FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

NO. 28

35¢
ANC

ALL BRAND NEW STORIES

A DOUBLE-ACTION POCKETBOOK

IRVING COX, Jr.

THEODORE L. THOMAS

L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

FANDO BINDER

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Author! Author!

WILLIAM L. BADE A large number of science-fiction authors aren't professional writers, in the sense that they do not depend upon the proceeds of their stories for a livelihood. For the most part, they're long-time enthusiasts who have studied the medium, as well as writing techniques, and who turn out a story every now and then when an idea hits them. The best stories, of course, come from theme-ideas, rather than inspirations for brilliant gadgets. William L. Bade is such an author, and "Decline" is such a story. Bade first started appearing in 1948, and long-term science-fiction readers will remember him for such stories as "Advent," and "Lost Ulysses."

EANDO BINDER Among the many science fictionists of the Thirties who turned to their hobby for a career were the Binder brothers, Earl and Otto; their first story appeared in 1932 under the joint pen-name of "Eando" for "E and O," of course. (A third brother, Jack, turned to artwork and produced numerous covers and interior illustrations for various science-fiction and fantasy magazines.) The writing Binders collaborated on a dozen or so tales, then Otto continued the name alone. He is probably best remembered for the "Via Etherline" and "Adam Link" series of short stories, novelets, and has just recently returned to magazine science fiction after a number of years' sojourn with other media.

IRVING COX, Jr. The boom in science fiction has brought forth a large number of new authors into the field. Some were men who were already professionals, well experienced in other fields, who decided to try their hand at breaking into a new market; others were new writers, starting out with science fiction. Mr. Cox falls into the latter category, and the quality of his work has proved pretty conclusively that he would have made his mark without the advantages of boom conditions.

L. SPRAGUE de CAMP As delightful a gentleman as you'd ever meet, Sprague is a maddening person to deal with in a blurb of this size, since several pages of close-set, small-size type would barely suffice to give a resume of his career. He's been appear-

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Illustrations by Emsh, Orban and Luton

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION, Number 28, published by Columbia Publications, Inc., 241 Church Street, New York 13, New York.

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Editorial

"MATURITY" IN SCIENCE FICTION-2

THOSE WHO have followed magazine science fiction for twenty years or more can testify to its "maturing" in the sense that the published fare has shown considerable development and technical improvement within this period. It has developed from the restricted area of simple narratives of amazing discoveries, tales of horrifying natural and cosmic catastrophes, stories of wonderful voyages, sagas of high adventure on strange worlds, accounts of how the nation or the world was saved from invading aliens, etc., to fiction dealing with every conceivable aspect of the future, or the not-yet-happened, that an author can sell for publication. The techniques of story-presentation have improved so that only the worst does not compare favorably with the general run of readable popular fiction, while some of the best is on a higher level.

In order to explain what I mean by "higher level," we'll have to take a birdseye view of the general differences between what we loosely call "popular fiction" and what we mean, to some extent, when we call a particular story or novel "literature." Both employ the same basic tools: language used in as affective manner as the author is able, to tell a story which, however complicated, has a line that runs from the beginning to the end; imaginary characters who are the subjects or objects of events in the story's milieu; events that include not only the actions but the motivations and desires of the characters, which same motivations and desires are among the events treated; specific goals and problems of the characters, the achievement, non-achievement, solution or non-solution of which make up the story-line. In both cases, the author will draw upon as wide a range of experience, general knowledge, and understanding

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of himself and his fellow human beings as he can in order to give the story verisimilitude, and to give his characters the necessary illusion of reality. In both cases the author's characters may be intensely real to him. And in both cases the author intends to offer entertainment — that is, to present a vivid and interesting story which editors and publishers believe will sell, and which people will want to read.

The difference in the end-product is partly that in stories we call "literature," the author has used his knowledge and understanding to explore and explain, through the many devices of story-presentation, aspects of human behavior — human nature, if you will — in such a way as to add something to the common knowledge and understanding; in "popular fiction" the author has merely made skillful use of other men's work, but has added nothing new, nor thrown any particular new light on what he has used. What we have in this case is merely an enjoyable story, well done — and this is nothing to belittle, as anyone who has labored over typewriter or pen trying to achieve as much knows. As I have said, and others more authoritative before me have said, the proportion of masterworks is very small when you consider how much is being written and published year in, year out, adding this to all that has been published since fiction first began to appear for sale.

One can read a work of first class popular fiction then, and enjoy it; you can re-read it and enjoy it again. But a work of literature requires more than one reading, no matter how expert and cognizant a reader you are; if you read "Don Quixote," say at the age of 25 and think you know it, I say unto you a re-reading at 35 will show you, perhaps to your astonishment, how much you missed the first time.

NOW WHAT many science-fictionists have said, or implied, when they have claimed "maturity" for science fiction is that the art of writing science fiction has now developed and improved to such an extent, that it is possible for "literature" to be produced by science fiction writers, and that there is an audience for such work. In order to consider this assertion, I think we had better see if there are subdivisions within the general genre of "science fiction," and explore each for possible fruitfulness along the lines of such hopes.

(*Continued on page 93*)

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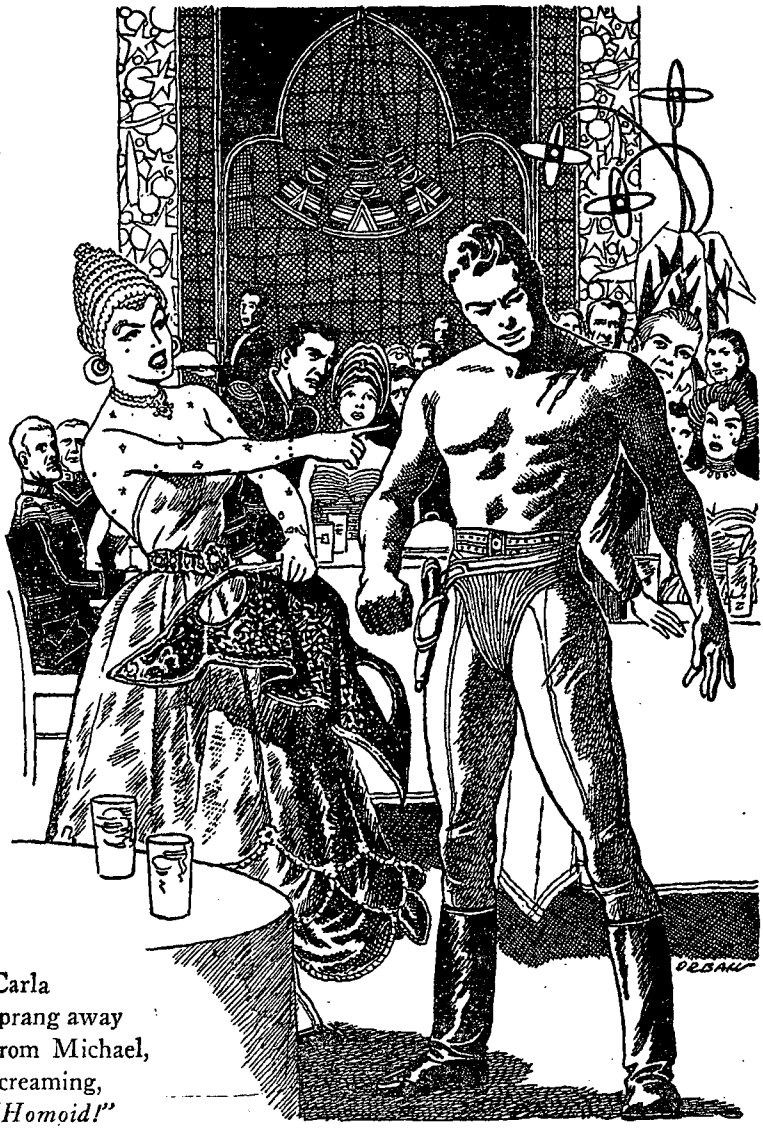

Carla sprang away from Michael, screaming, *"Homoid!"*

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When a world lives in fear, sometimes records must be falsified . . .

NOVEL

MARK OF THE HOMOID

by Irving Cox, Jr.

THE decels spit blue fire as Michael Arn's sky-car settled gracefully toward Desert City. The sealed Codex flashed the recognition signal that passed him through the energy dome arching over the city, and the automatic landing beam took over with a lurch of the controls.

Having nothing further to do until the sky-car nosed into the private Landing Rack on the roof of the Arn Estate, Michael Arn relaxed and glanced out at the city. He had been home for less than a week, but he had still not altogether overcome his awe of the metropolis

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built on the shore of the artificial lake carved in the heart of the Mojave.

In Desert City the massive Class 1 villas lay along the lakeshore, their ornate marble walls mirrored in the quiet water. A tropical park separated the estate sector from the apartment zone of the Second and Third Class citizens. A second strip of park cut off the filthy clutter of the Class 4 slums, crowding close to the factory vents. The bulk of the factories lay underground, probing sometimes a thousand feet into the earth, so that only an entry building, which housed reception rooms, executive offices and elevator shafts, was visible. Because of the scientific use of radiant power, no industrial waste polluted the air, yet the sharp clarity of the atmosphere served only to emphasize the glaring ugliness of the city.

As Arn climbed out of his sky-car, he saw Carla running up the ramp. Pale and trembling, she flung herself into his arms. "Oh, Michael, why did you go?"

"There wasn't any danger, Carla."

"But you were outside the city, alone —"

"Our sky-cars are armed, and we haven't had a Homoid attack in two centuries. I think it's time we stopped being afraid of nothing."

"Did you —" She hesitated, her lips quivering. "Did you show the council your plans?"

"That's what I went for."

"Without even having father check them! He says the power multiple you want to use will —"

Arn turned her face up and kissed her lightly on the lips. "It just happens he's wrong; I didn't spend sixteen years at the G. C. Academy for nothing. The council's given me the go-ahead to build a working model before the next general meeting." He took her arm and led her across the roof toward the shaded entrance to the house. "Remember, I promised you a celebration if they accepted my plans?"

"Yes, Michael," she whispered; for some reason she was shivering, in spite of the heat of the late afternoon.

"We'll go to the Lakeview. It's time I let Desert City know there's an Arn back in town, running Arn Rockets again." When he turned to smile at her, he saw tears swimming in the depths of her brown eyes, and he reached tenderly for her hand. "I'm sorry, Carla! I didn't mean it the way it sounded. You and Uncle Fred —"

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"I quite understand, Michael."

"But you don't! If Uncle Fred hadn't taken over here after father died, there wouldn't be any Arn Rockets for me to inherit; I know that. I know he's done a magnificent job, and he'll go right on doing it. It's just that — that —"

"I said I understood, Michael." Her tone was sad, rather than angry. "I'll be ready in an hour; will that be soon enough?"

FEELING DEFEATED and unsure of himself, Michael Arn strode to his own room, which overlooked the lake. He glanced at the marble walls, the gilded columns, the rich hangings, the lofty ceiling arch, painted with a series of sensuous scenes. The outer walls, fitted to slide open for access to a wide, stone-walled balcony, were of a glass-like substance, palely tinged with blue. The flick of a dial could readjust the material of the wall to cut out all or part of the sunlight.

So long accustomed to the austerity of the dormitory at the G. C. Academy, Michael Arn did not feel at home in such a room. But it had been designed and furnished by his parents; here they had been killed during the abortive uprising of the Class 4s when Michael was five years old. He still recalled the terrifying nightmare of blood-spattered marble, and the tormented twist of his mother's head as she lay sprawled over the bed. Michael Arn could not bring himself to change their room, although style had grown vastly more flamboyant in the past sixteen years. Only one thing had been added, on the day Arn returned to Desert City: a battery of subsonic energizers concealed in the walls. If there ever came another uprising, the mob would find Michael by no means as defenseless as his parents had been.

After showering, in a stall-room lined with gold, Arn put on his dress uniform: skin-tight, blue satin trousers that came up six inches above his waist, and a loose, sleeveless, yellow jacket, delicately ornamented with star sapphires. Of Arabian derivation, the jacket left most of his chest exposed. Broad-shouldered, bronze-skinned, heavily muscled, Arn wore such a costume well; even the peaked, tasseled, blue hat seemed suited to the alert, energetic set of his face. He was drawing on the regulation Class 1 military boots when Uncle Fred came quietly into the room.

"Carla says the District Council approved your plans," he said.

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Tall, thin, white-haired, stooped and prominently boned, Fred Collins was as unsuited to the Class 1 uniform as a barnyard hen to the feathers of a peacock. The satin sagged on his thin limbs like rumpled rags. In spite of his dignity and reserve, he always appeared amusing and clown-like.

"They've given me permission to build a model," Arn answered.

"I wish you hadn't gone."

"Now don't tell me you're worried about Homoids, too, Uncle Fred!"

"We have every reason to be."

"When the earth hasn't been attacked in two centuries?"

"Two Homoids were taken right here in Desert City a month ago."

"Oh, that." Arn gestured airily. "There are Homoids here on earth, of course; there have been since the first invasion. They're harmless, as long as they're cut off from their home planet."

"Harmless? When they make the kind of trouble that killed your parents?"

"Our psychiatrists know how to identify them now, Uncle Fred. When they take over a man, they always leave two little scars on his shoulder. And I've heard that no Homoid can move in on you, unless you're willing, and —"

"Have it your way, Michael; when I was a boy, we had a healthy respect for our enemy. But that isn't what I came to talk to you about, exactly." Fred Collins kneaded his wrinkled chin hesitantly. "I want you to give up building this rocket."

"But the council has already approved my plans, Uncle Fred!"

"Tell them — tell them your model failed."

With legs spread wide and hands on his hips, Arn stood squarely in front of the older man. His voice was suddenly cold with suspicion. "You've been against this from the start; why?"

"I don't want you to make a fool of yourself."

"I won't."

"You can't put that much power into the tubes we build!"

"The power ratio doesn't increase with my radial setup. Think what it means, Uncle Fred, if I succeed! We'll be able to reach the stars. For two hundred years we've been imprisoned on the earth, terrified of another Homoid invasion. With my rocket we can turn the tables, carry the war back to their planet!"

"Remember one thing, Michael. They came only once, and that was two centuries ago."

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"And they nearly destroyed our civilization."

"The point is, they haven't come back. If you carry the war into their territory now, if you start active hostilities again —"

"You're suggesting that men can never leave the earth, because we're afraid." Arn put his arm affectionately around the old man's shoulders. "I know there's a danger; but there's a universe to conquer, too."

"Perhaps — perhaps there's a race on another planet more suited to rule the universe than ours."

"If they can take it and hold it, yes; otherwise, it belongs to any people who can. Personally, I'm betting on ourselves."

With a twinge of age, Fred Collins drew his flimsy, sleeveless jacket around his thin shoulders. "Arn Rockets belongs to you, Michael; you can make your own decisions, of course. I'll go and see if Carla's ready."

WHEN HE WAS alone, Michael Arn thrust his feet into the robo-polisher. While the soft puffs whirred over the black leather, he smiled with wry amusement. He was sure he understood Uncle Fred far more precisely than the older man meant that he should.

After Arn's parents had been murdered in the short-lived rebellion, the Class 1 courts had made Michael a ward of the Governing Corps Academy at Middleport, Kansas, and appointed Fred Collins executor of the Arn estate. Collins was not Michael's uncle, but simply his father's closest living relative — and, at the time, only a Second Class citizen. Until Michael came of age, both Uncle Fred and Carla held temporary Class status; they continued to hold it now at Michael's discretion. Naturally the old man hated to give up his position of authority after holding it for sixteen years. It obviously seemed to him that he could make himself secure if he made his advice vital to Arn. Yet, Michael reflected with a laugh, if Fred Collins had eyes to see beyond the threat to his own ego, he could have stopped worrying. For Arn was in love with Carla; their marriage would automatically make her status permanent, and along with it her father's.

Before he left his bedroom, Arn buckled on his jeweled, platinum energizer. Though a highly efficient and deadly weapon, the gun was by no means a battle instrument, but rather a mark of rank, worn with all formal uniforms. Arn waited for Carla in the teakwood-

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paneled reception room at the foot of a curving, marble stairway.

She moved down toward him in a shimmering cloud of perfumed beauty. Her long, golden hair was drawn up from her head around a hollow core of a concealed, plastic cone, giving her oval face the fashionable, pointed crown. Her arms were bare, gracefully studded with scattered jewels; and the arch of her eyebrows was artificially straightened into curving crescents by gleaming bands of onyx fixed to her skin. She wore a gown of an organdy-like material, made from spun gold and platinum, so that when light struck it from one angle it appeared to be yellow, and, from another, a pale, moonlit blue. The dress was gathered tight at her waist by a jeweled collar, but the skirt spilled in yards and yards of material into a bell-shape, crusted with hanging pearl bands.

It was three miles to the Lakeview Club. They drove the distance in a black lacquered landau, drawn by a pair of matched geldings. Since Michael Arn had been home for only seven days, he was still unused to the form of transportation which had become so fashionable with the Class 1s. The pneumotubes used in the city were cleaner, and certainly more rapid and efficient. Yet he understood why the Class 1s had adopted the ancient horse-drawn carriage. It set them apart, exhibiting the leisure of their station; and the trend in women's fashions made it impossible for them to squeeze their tremendous skirts into the confining pneumotube cars.

The sky above them was lit red by the setting sun as they drove through the tropical park bordering the estate zone. It was dark when they emerged at the Lakeview Club. Michael Arn pulled the carriage up short behind a row of similar landaus which were being passed slowly through a police barricade.

He looked at Carla.

"What's all this?" he demanded.

"The usual inspection for Homoids."

"Here?" He laughed unbelievingly. "At a Class 1 resort?"

"All the police do is look at your shoulder to make sure the little scars aren't there."

"But a Homoid wouldn't come —"

"You've been away a long time, Michael, and I don't suppose the Homoids ever penetrated as far inland as Kansas. Their attack was made on the coast, you know. They say there are thousands of them still living in the old ruins."

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"Then why don't we simply send out a G. C. unit to clear them out?"

"The conscripted Class 4s are still afraid of radiation, for one thing, and —"

"That danger was over generations ago. G. C. archeologists have been working in the ruins for years. They've even done a little restoration in San Francisco, and the council is planning to rebuild London and Moscow."

"But have you ever seen Los Angeles, or any of the other old cities?"

"Only from the air."

"Then you must know how far the ruins extend. Literally miles and miles of rubble, and sandy streets, and half-smashed buildings. Too many places to hide. An entire G. C. unit could prowl around for years and never flush out a single Homoid."

II

THEIR carriage came abreast of the barricade. Respectfully a sergeant took Arn's name, while another peeled back his yellow jacket and flashed a pinpoint light on his shoulder. After Carla had passed the same inspection, they drove on into the yard of the Lakeview Club. Liveried servants took their landau to the stables, and they entered the ebony-walled lounge of the sprawling building perched on pilings over the water of the lake.

The Arn name was well-known to the Club host; although Michael had not been there before, there was always a chance that he might prove a profitable patron in the future. The host gave them a table in the popular Moonlight Room, twenty feet from the stage and within convenient distance of the autobar.

The Club, as always, was densely crowded, primarily by the younger set. The men wore uniforms which were identically cut, but the colors of the satins were different. The Class 1s were the executives, the politicians, the industrialists, the top technicians and scientists of the World State; they were also ranked as military officers, although the functioning corps of conscripts were drawn from the disfranchised Class 4s. As officers, the men wore the military uniforms and the platinum energizers, but it had become tradition to associate certain specific combinations of color with special types of

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activity. Thus, Arn and other rocket manufacturers tended to wear blue and yellow; the lawyers and politicians favored shades of red; and the scientists wore white, figured with cubistic abstractions in black braid.

Carla Collins ate moodily, toying with her steak and ignoring the goblets of imported wine. Arn sat close to her, his legs touching hers; and he felt a slow-rising annoyance. It was customary for a man to take a woman to a Club for the purpose of making love to her; but Carla put him off as if she knew nothing of tradition. First she talked innocuously of his life at the G. C. Academy; then of his sky-car trip that afternoon to offer his radial-rocket plan to the District Council.

"How soon will you have the model finished?" she asked at last.

"In a week; maybe less. I'm going to turn the whole plant loose on it tomorrow."

"So soon, Michael?"

"There's no reason to wait." Impatiently he snaked his hand behind her back, running his fingers over her soft skin. But she drew away.

"I wish you wouldn't, Michael."

"Not put my arm —"

"Don't make the rocket! The Homoids are bound to find out; they'll make trouble. They won't let us finish anything that's a threat to their home planet." She enlarged upon the idea eagerly, with a tense, frightened emotion. He listened, smiling with amusement.

Carla was nearly his own age. He had known her since childhood. The regulations of the G. C. Academy had not permitted him to return to Desert City during his sixteen years of attendance, but Uncle Fred and Carla had gone to Kansas to spend every holiday with him. Carla and Arn had been apart just often enough for him to be thoroughly conscious of her growth to physical maturity. Four years ago he had fallen in love with her, when he took her to his first Summer Prom. Now the desire pounded like volcanic fire in his veins. As her voice fell silent, he drew her into his arms.

"Rockets!" he whispered. "What a dull thing to talk about now!"

His lips were searching for hers, but she turned her head aside. "I mean it, Michael; I want you to promise me you won't go through with this."

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"Don't be foolish, Carla. It's nothing for you to worry about. And this is definitely not the time or place —"

She drew back and looked into his eyes. "You absolutely refuse to give it up, Michael?"

"Yes."

For a moment she held herself away from him. But then, sighing with resignation, she collapsed in his arms. Her lips were warmly liquid. He felt her hand caressing his chest, moving like padded silk beneath his loose, yellow jacket. For another split second the rising ecstacy lasted.

Then a tiny pain stabbed at his shoulder, and Carla sprang away from him, screaming.

"Homoid!"

She ripped off his jacket. Dumbly he looked down at two telltale wounds in his shoulder. Naked to the waist, he backed away from the table, while she screeched the alarm again, *"Homoid! Homoid!"*

TRIGGERED BY the sound of the word, as the water system would have been by the cry of *Fire!,* the glaring overhead lights came on, focusing Arn in a cone of blinding brilliance. Surrounded by armed Class 1s, there was no chance he could escape immediate annihilation, if they had not responded according to the specialization of their training. The table nearest to Arn's had been occupied by a group of lawyers. Their first reaction was to establish evidence of the danger before taking steps to stamp it out. It was only a matter of seconds for one of the men to whip out his pocket microcam and photograph Arn with the starkly betraying wounds on his shoulder.

But it was time enough — not for Arn to think critically, but for him to respond to the instinct of self-preservation. He jerked out his energizer. Even then, if he had attempted to threaten the mob, he would have been taken; but he reacted only to primitive fear, and the source of his fear was the blazing cone of light. He pressed the trigger of the energizer and swept a fan of subsonic disintegration shattering over the ceiling.

Smashed ornamental glass rained in fragments on the floor of the Club. Wiring spluttered, fused, parted. Lights untouched burst with a power they had not been built to handle. In a puff of flame and noise, the Lakeview Club was plunged into darkness; and the

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darkness became chaos as guests fought to protect themselves from the falling glass.

Arn grasped the edge of a table and swung it blindly. He heard the crunch of shattered heads, the sudden cries of pain. All around him was the peculiar cracking sound of shattered walls, as the men fired their energizers wildly into the darkness. Using the table as a battering ram, Arn cleared a way to the door.

Once outside the worst of his terror began to subside. He was able to think with a kind of rationality. He had, perhaps, a minute before they would discover he had left the Club; that gave him no time to get his landau from the stable. However, the glitter of the outside lights had gone out, too. Arn was able to slip past the police barricade and escape into the park.

He ran along the gravel road, while clanging bells and probing searchlights behind him indicated that the confusion was beginning to be organized. In an interval of silence he heard the baying of the police dogs. Shortly the methodical dragnet would begin to sweep the park.

He ran again, until he fell panting on the soft grass of a picnic clearing, peaceful in the tropical silence. He was close to the edge of the park, at the outer border of the city. He could see a part of the row of giant energizers which encircled Desert City — and every other town and city in the World State. Each machine was like a kettledrum standing on a low tripod. Arm-thick cables joined the separate units. They seemed dead, but Arn knew that they shot invisible bands of destructive subsonic energy into a gigantic dome joined above the city.

Beyond the row of energizers he saw the miles and miles of lush fields that covered the fertile floor of the Mojave Desert. Tended entirely by the tremendous agricultural machines manned by the Class 3s, the rich farmland produced food for the city and tons of grain and cotton for export.

Yet the beckoning fields offered Arn no chance of escape or haven, for he could not have passed through the subsonic barrier without a Codex, which temporarily negativized a limited area in the energy field.

At least for the moment, Arn knew he was trapped in Desert City. Since Carla had ripped off his yellow jacket, it could be used to give the police dogs his scent. He might gain a brief respite if he

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could return to the Arn estate and change into another uniform; but that, he realized, was what he would be expected to do. In a period of crisis, the typical Class 1 was driven by an inner instinct to run to the safety of his estate. For that reason Arn's parents had fled to their home during the rebellion and died there, when they could have survived in the city garrison.

Understanding the psychology of his Class, Arn was determined not to be trapped by it. The alternative was to go into another part of the city. The choice was peculiarly hard, because to a Class 1 the city meant only the area of the estates. The rest was a necessary evil, a kind of social accruement as important as the foundation of a house, but as easily forgotten in enjoying the structure erected upon it.

The park was walled with electrified paralyzer wires to keep out any straying Second or Third Class citizens who might be tempted to pass the class barrier. Arn cut a segment out of the fence with a blast from his platinum energizer, and passed through into the apartment zone of the city.

It was geographically small in size, since the two classes which occupied it were numerically no larger than the Class 1s. Farmers, minor technicians, skilled mechanics, shop foremen, the Second and Third Class citizens enjoyed a limited franchise, and a number of social privileges. They elected their own community governing committee and they were permitted occasionally to send non-voting delegates to the General Council. Within their own area they made and executed their own laws, subject only to Class 1 veto.

THE DIFFERENCE between the Second and Third class was in degree of income, and therefore of luxuries enjoyed. The Class 3s lived in plainer, smaller, far less ornate apartment buildings; many of the Second Class structures were as elaborate, as heavy with decoration, as a Class 1 estate. Both classes had considerable leisure, and no curfew was imposed.

Consequently Michael Arn found the clean, treeless streets crowded with people, particularly in the vicinity of the glittering amusement centers. Mobs were hunched on the cushioned lounges, methodically eating a variety of confections while they watched an adventure unfold on the enormous, three-dimensional Storyscreen. Other throngs in the eating gardens, happily intoxicated on the immensely popular

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Morphia-cocain capsules, joined raucously in community singing and applauded with lascivious abandon the frankly lewd dance routines paraded on the rickety stages.

Arn was still wearing his Class 1 uniform, minus the jacket, which in this area would normally have brought him immediate attention and respect. Now it would serve only to point him out; and there was no way he could conceal the two red wounds on his shoulder.

He lurked in the alley shadows between two apartment buildings on a crowded amusement square. On the face of a building opposite a tremendous Storyscreen hung at an angle over the mob, picturing in gaudy color the romance of two Second Class laboratory assistants who suspected that Homoids had penetrated their factory. When the story had wound to its end, the crowd would disperse. Arn hoped he would have an opportunity, then, to isolate one of the men. A weakened dispersal of his energizer blast would paralyze his victim long enough for Arn to steal his clothes. And Arn knew the attack would put him in no immediate danger, for only First Class citizens were permitted to bear arms.

Suddenly everything went wrong. Two children, playing tag on the outskirts of the throng, darted into the alley and saw Arn. In the darkness the only thing either of them could identify was the sheen of his Class 1 uniform. It was their way of showing respect, to set up a cry of excitement and to try to draw him out into the crowd. Adults gathered quickly at the mouth of the alley. Clenching his jaw in anger and fingering his energizer, Michael Arn moved reluctantly out into the light.

It was one of the children who saw the telltale marks on his shoulder, but at the same time the Storyscreen blazed up with the first police warning, a full scale three-dimensional mock up of Arn's face. A metallic voice began to reel off statistics of his height, weight, personality classification, and probable course of action. The small crowd in the alley shrank back in terror.

Arn flashed his energizer before him and began to run. Within seconds the whole apartment strip was in alarm, as every Storyscreen chattered the warning. Arn was still safe because he was armed and the mob was not. But, now that he had been seen, it would be no more than three minutes before heavily-armed Class 1 police units stormed into the area.

Arn darted into the Second-third Class park, smaller and by no

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means as splendid as the park bordering the Class 1 estates. Trembling, he huddled in the shadow of an elm, listening while the sounds of pursuit moved closer. Only then did it occur to him to break through the wall into the Fourth Class slum.

To do so was superficially unthinkable. No Class 1 ever went alone into that area, for the millions who lived there were technically classed as subhuman. Yet it offered Arn the undeniable advantage of size and a maze of twisting, cluttered streets. There he might hide forever. His chief danger would arise from the people themselves; but he assumed he had the intelligence to fabricate a convincing disguise.

The wall that bordered the Second-third Class park was no mere strand of paralyzer wires. This was solid metal, twenty feet high, electrified so that it brought death on contact, rather than a temporary paralysis. It took a full minute of blast from his energizer before the metal shattered.

III

ARN SLIPPED through the opening into a fetid, stinking darkness. The narrow, unlighted streets were filled with litter. The towering, warren-like, cement structures where the people lived, blotted out even the faint light of the moon. The Class 4s had neither a franchise nor leisure. They worked at assigned tasks in the underground factories; they fed in the communal kitchens; they slept; and they bred. The area was subdivided by a number of broad highways, periodically patrolled by motorized police units. But in between the boulevards were the twisted, filthy networks of alleys.

Arn knew, as every Class 1 knew, that only the appearance of the curfew was ever observed. The silent, midnight alleys throbbed with crime and revolution. But the ceaseless plotting was permitted to exist, for as long as the slums were policed and the people unarmed, the scheming was pointless; yet it seemed to give the Fourth Class a psychological hope that ultimately made their labor more efficient. Homoids, too, were crowded into the slums, fomenting trouble and seeking converts.

As Arn felt his way along an alley wall, he collided with a man; before he could turn and run, the man had made a light.

"You're in uniform!"

With intuitive hatred, the Class 4 sprang at Arn, tearing at his

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skin with ragged nails. Arn squirmed out of the ape-like arms, and pulled out his energizer. The man flung a brick with deadly accuracy. As pain stabbed at Arn's naked chest, he fired.

There was a gasp of pain, and silence. Breathing heavily Arn took off his uniform and drew on the coarse, gray cottons worn by his victim. With a twinge of anticipated discomfort, he discarded his military boots; in the mild climate of Desert City the Class 4s went barefoot. A work card, which naturally its bearer could not read, identified the dead man as Charles 17-DC, employed by United Textiles.

Arn had his disguise. Methodically he played his energizer on the body, and on his uniform, until the matter had completely disintegrated. He moved away along the alley, blood trickling from the gash torn in his chest. As he walked, the pain mounted slowly. Yet he crossed two broad boulevards before he considered it safe to stop. In a dead-end alley he found a small alcove and squeezed into it. When he began to relax, the pain redoubled and a peculiar sense of weakness assailed his mind.

The wound was still bleeding; he knew it needed attention, but there was nowhere that he could go for that. The important thing, at the moment, was that he had escaped pursuit; in the morning he could begin to plan a way of leaving Desert City.

A way to leave! As he realized what that meant, the whole tumult of the past hour came into focus in his mind. Carla had called him a Homoid. Every informational screen in the city would be repeating that warning, along with his description, his probable pattern of action, and the reward for destroying him.

The police psychologists were extremely clever. They knew almost as much about the working of his mind as Arn did himself. But since he was aware of that he had a chance. He was still a free agent, with free choice of his own; he had already demonstrated that by resisting the urge to go back to the Arn estate.

But he was accused of being a Homoid!

He fingered the tiny wounds in his shoulder. A Homoid was a sentient entity which existed within the body of a rational being, feeding upon its strength and occupying its mind. The Homoids moved from victim to victim by a vampire kiss on the shoulder. They converted men into automatons which did the bidding of an invader who had once nearly destroyed the culture of the World State.

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Then Arn should have lost his self-conscious individuality; and he had not. His identification of himself as a person should have disappeared. The betraying mark of the Homoid was on his shoulder, yet nothing had changed. He still made his own decisions, felt the loneliness and terror of his own fear.

It had been Carla Collins who had first seen the twin wounds. Not ten minutes before, they had both been inspected and passed through the police barricade outside the Lakeview Club. The only person who had contacted Arn after that time had been Carla, which meant that she had passed the infection on to him. He recalled the small pain he had felt as her hand moved over his skin. But if Carla was Homoid, how had she passed the police inspection? Why had she screamed with hysteria when she saw the wounds, which obviously she had made herself?

Arn tried to look psychologically inward, to examine the processes of his own brain. He was in entire command of it. He felt no sense of another person lurking there. He could not have become Homoid without being conscious of the transformation. He still had the familiar memories of Michael Arn's past; he still recognized the characteristics of Michael Arn's traits. If a Homoid lived in his brain, what had become of the Homoid memory, the Homoid integration of personality? On the other hand, if the Homoid lost its own identity after it had invaded a new victim, what difference did it make? The whole thing — the fear which had possessed and tormented the earth for two centuries — was nonsense.

Men were afraid of an invader that did not exist, perhaps never had existed. It was a legend, a fairy tale, a crude joke compounded out of suspicion and superstition. As he realized the implication of such a conclusion, Arn's concept of his society shifted subtly. It was like a beautiful fabric suddenly soiled and beginning to wear at the seams. A people that could build the scientifically advanced civilization symbolized by the energizers, the sky-cars, the rocket converters, was subjectively imprisoned by a social pattern derived from ghosts.

HE PULLED himself to his feet. By accident he had learned the truth. It should be a simple matter to explain it to others. True, every Class 1 police corps in the city was hunting for him. He was in enormous personal danger, because anyone could destroy him on

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sight. Yet he had friends among the Class 1s; they were rational people, scientifically trained as he was, many of them graduates of the G. C. Academy at Middleport, Kansas. If he could reach them and explain what he knew, the whole apparatus of public fear could be destroyed.

Eagerly he ran along the silent, littered alley toward one of the wide boulevards, which would take him back to the Class 1 area. He only vaguely considered how he would pass the police patrols, or circumvent the walls again; for his mind suddenly bloomed with the prospect of a shower and a clean uniform. After he had returned to the Arn estate —

His pace slowed. He stopped, clenching his fists in dismay. To return was a predictable pattern, part of his psychological makeup. The police psychiatrists would be counting on that, waiting for him. By the stealth of a rationalization, he had almost blundered into a trap of his own creation.

No Class 1 citizen — personal friend or stranger — would listen to anything he had to say, for the mark of the Homoid was on his shoulder. To them Michael Arn had ceased to exist. He would be a Homoid talking, using the sly falsehoods of an enemy alien; from their point of view they would be justified in taking any measures to destroy him. To Arn it seemed to be the ultimate level of frustration. He could have dissipated their Homoid fears, freed them from their earth prison for the conquest of the stars. But, by the very nature of the way it would have to be done, he could accomplish nothing.

He felt a deadening weakness and exhaustion. He crept into an angle where two walls met. Huddled against the stone, he would be safe until dawn. By that time he might be able to work out some solution to the problem. He considered the possibility of using his energizer to seize a Storyscreen transmitter. He could hold it long enough to cry the truth to the watching city.

The truth? But what was it? He knew it only subjectively. His own continuing individuality was his only proof, and the structure of the Homoid fear invalidated it. The popular belief in the Homoid must have had some sort of a beginning in an actual event of the past. Hazily he determined to go to the Record Building and look up the history of the Homoids.

He began to doze; and jerked himself awake, with a shock of fear.

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He dared not sleep. But as the warmth of the coarse cotton seeped into his body, he began to nod again. The clanging of the dawn bell, shrilling through the Fourth Class sector, pulled him awake.

It was morning. Men, women and children, in various stages of undress, poured out of the crowded tenements, running along the alleys toward the rows of communal kitchens on the boulevard. Michael Arn joined the mob. To have done otherwise would have made him unnecessarily conspicuous.

Arn was acquainted with the general system of the area. The work card which he had taken from Charles 17-DC entitled the bearer to two meals, dinner the night before and breakfast this morning. The cards were issued to the workers when they left the factories at dusk; without a card, a worker didn't eat. Thus, quite simply, Arn's society saw to it that there were no slackers among the labor force.

Only three groups of Class 4s were temporarily exempt — children under ten, who were given the rudiments of education in the crowded Vocatorium; the sick, confined in the isolation wards; and workers sent to the Record Building for a brushup on special skills. Sometimes the brushups were necessary, but usually they were disciplinary assignments, to punish workers needlessly slow on the job. No Class 4 wanted such an assignment, for the work card issued by the librarian in the Record Building entitled him to half-rations only.

Yet it was only by getting himself such an assignment that Arn, as a Class 4, would have access to the history of the Homoid invasion.

OUTSIDE THE communal kitchens the workers queued up to pass through the shower-sanitation room. For a moment, Arn was frightened. If it was obligatory for him to remove his cotton coat, the wounds on his shoulder would be visible. Yet he observed that many of the people went fully dressed into the showers, in order to launder their clothing at the same time they themselves were washed.

Arn did the same. The sopping cotton was a surprisingly small inconvenience, for by the time he had been soaked by the knife-sharp spray of icy water, showered by the choking disinfectant mist, and blasted with arid air in the drying corridor, the cotton was almost as dry as he was.

At the entry door of the kitchen he surrendered his work card. He received a tray of food: a steaming bowl of cereal, a quarter of a loaf of black bread, three eggs, a dish of fresh fruit. The Fourth

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Class was well fed, just as the farm animals were well fed; it was poor economy to do otherwise.

Arn crowded into a place on a wooden bench and ate hungrily. On the information screen that dominated one end of the room the usual morning visitalk was in progress. A smiling Class 1 psychiatrist was explaining, in a syrupy voice, the virtue of service to maintain the scientific stability of the World State. Episodic scenes contrasted the present mass welfare of the workers with the chaos and privation of the distant past. The former competitive society was bitterly condemned, compared in terms of biting sarcasm to the modern conditions of world co-operation and brotherhood.

The talk faded and the daily news bulletin flashed on the screen. Arn's blood pounded when he saw an enlargement of his own face. The metallic voice began to repeat the usual information and offer of reward, but new details had been added. Arn was said to be the first Homoid ever unmasked among the Class 1s; platdiscs found at his estate indicated that he had been Homoid for as long as ten years. The police knew that he had escaped into the Class 2 area, but apparently they were not yet aware that he had crossed the other boundary as well. To the reward had been added a new inducement: any man taking Arn would be raised one level in class status.

The Class 4s crowding the kitchen had shown not the slightest interest in the visitalk, but they reacted immediately to the police bulletin. Anger and fear permeated the room in almost visible waves. On all sides Arn heard muttered threats, quivering protests of personal loyalty.

"Torture 'em, that's what," Arn's neighbor — a young girl of fifteen — declared.

She seemed to expect him to reply. He answered cautiously, "The Homoids? But I don't see what good —"

"Make an example for the others; throw real fear into 'em." She bit a mouthful from her chunk of bread and began to chew on it viciously. "We caught a Homoid once, down on the ninth level of the steel works."

"You actually saw the marks on his shoulder?"

"I di'n't myself, but that don't matter. Ruthy 19 said she seen 'em, and that was enough for us. Know what we done to him?" She smiled pleasantly and a trickle of food rolled down her chin. "We killed him in pieces, kind of. Scratched out his eyes first. Done it myself,

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while the others held him down. An' all the time he kep' yellin' he wasn't no Homoid. Said Ruthy 'cused him, because he wouldn't shack with her no more. They all say somethin' like that, though." She swilled her bread down with a gulp of hot cereal.

"But what would've happened if — if he'd been telling the truth? Shouldn't you have made sure first?"

"Maybe he was." She shrugged. "You can't take no chances with a Homoid. It's better to kill a few of us by mistake, if we can wipe 'em all out. After that we won't have to work so hard, and they'll let us have some time off, an' maybe see some of them Storyscreen shows every night."

Arn's hopes sank as she talked. He had supposed that among the Class 4s he could readily find an audience that would believe the truth when he knew it. Having nothing to lose, they would have the most to gain by overthrowing the fear that dominated the society. But apparently the Homoid superstition was even stronger here than among the Class 1s, and more unreasonably violent.

A bell clanged, and a precise, slow voice from the information screen issued the daily work assignments.

"All number classifications from one through fifteen will report as previously assigned. Females, thirty through forty, reassigned to Union Fashions; males, sixteen through twenty, reassigned to Arn Rockets. Higher classifications remain unchanged. That is all."

IV

IT WAS some seconds before Arn realized that, as Charles 17-DC, the reassignment applied to him. All Fourth Class children at birth were given a single registered name, which the mother was allowed to select. The number was added, depending upon how many other living individuals in the city bore the same name. Thus, a very popular name, such as Wanda, might have classifications extending into the thousands. The name and number were branded on the child's thigh, because it was a social truism that no Class 4 could remember even his own name.

Arn knew he was in luck. Arn Rockets was the one place where he was enough at home to make his work so clearly inefficient that he would be certain to be sent to the Record Building for a brushup. When he joined the line moving toward the plant elevators, he found

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his table companion standing behind him. She smiled and held out her hand.

" So you're 'signed to us," she said. "Glad to know you; my name's Wanda 972."

"I'm Charles 17."

She ran her hand appreciatively up the muscles of his arm and smiled again. "They're stric' here. One slip, an' they send you out for a brushup. Stay close to me; I'll show you the ropes. A man like you can't do without no dinner!"

"Thanks."

"Say, got yourself a woman?"

Unacquainted with the details of Class 4 protocol, Arn replied honestly, "As a matter of fact, no, but —"

"Then how about shackin' up with me? I'll throw out Bob. You can try it for tonight, anyhow."

He knew he'd better not refuse flatly.

Remembering her story of the revenge taken by Ruthy 19 when she was dissatisfied with her man, Arn answered evasively, but it seemed to satisfy her. She engineered his assignment to her own level, and almost immediately her friendship proved awkward. Whenever the Class 3 foreman appeared, Arn tried to bungle his work so that he would be assigned to the Record Building. But always Wanda 972 came to his rescue, so that Arn's inefficiency went unobserved.

In the stifling heat most of the workers stripped off their outer garments, down to their gray, cotton briefs. Arn dared not remove his coat, for the wounds on his shoulder would have been seen. Wanda looked at him oddly.

"Take 'em off," she advised. "Show the girls what you got."

"I — I've been working in metals," he answered. "I'm used to more heat than this." The sweat beading his face made the lie obvious, but she seemed to accept it.

"Yeah," she agreed. "Don't take no chances on catchin' nothin'."

The work of mass producing rocket converters was so simplified that it was almost impossible to make a mistake. The Class 1 efficiency experts, as Arn knew, planned each task so that none would tax even the ability of a low-level moron. With Wanda 972 acting as a self-appointed guardian angel, Arn could literally do no wrong.

At noon the food trucks were wheeled into the factories. The workers had a twenty minute rest period then. Arn knew where the

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Record Building assignment cards were kept, in a small supply room adjoining the ground level executive offices. Thoroughly acquainted with the design of the plant, he had no difficulty slipping up to the top level and stealing one of the cards. As he was leaving he heard Uncle Fred's voice in the outer office. Arn almost leaped through the door, until he remembered that that would be a psychologically predictable action. If Carla had betrayed him in the Lakeview Club, her father would certainly turn him over to the police now.

Arn listened at the door, and the voices came clearly. Uncle Fred and Carla were together. They seemed to be going through Arn's desk, destroying some of his records and substituting other visireels and platdiscs for them.

"That should give the police all the proof they need," Uncle Fred said.

"Well, it's consistent," Carla agreed, "going back as far as ten years. What about the rocket plans?"

"I've got them; tomorrow we'll report the failure of the model. But I don't think you'd better deliver them for a week or so."

"Probably not. Have they traced Michael any farther?"

"The last I heard they were still searching the Third Class apartments."

"I think he'll get away. He has enough of his father in him to . . ." Their voices faded as they left the office.

It was hard to believe at first.

Suddenly their scheme made sense to Arn. Uncle Fred and Carla both knew the value of his radial-rocket design, but to use it they had to remove him first. Somehow Carla had made the wounds in his shoulder just before she denounced him. Now they were busy fabricating evidence for the police to find. Later, Carla was to deliver the rocket plans to someone else, obviously a competitor. Their reward, of course, would be permanent Class 1 status.

It was like the story Wanda 972 had told him. The Homoid accusation always provoked a blind, unreasoned response. It was a convenient way of removing a rival, a personal enemy. But was the whole social fear of the Homoid no more than a tool for the unscrupulous? If so, how had the mass delusion originally been implanted so indelibly in the thinking of society? He fingered his Record Building card grimly. That he intended to find out, and when he did so he could rip the whole ridiculous superstition to shreds.

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ARN DID NOT return to the level where he had been working; it seemed totally unnecessary. The foreman might miss him as a unit out of the whole, but not as a specific individual. And Arn's fellow workers would simply assume that his obvious clumsiness had finally resulted in a brushup assignment. The Record Building card passed him easily by the Class 2 guards at the plant gate.

The Record Building was a huge structure, ornately beautiful, lying close to the geometric center of Desert City, on a heavily guarded island of land shared jointly by all four classes. It housed millions of ancient books (kept primarily as curiosities) and the modern visireels and platdiscs which recorded the history and technology of the World State. No class was obliged to learn the art of reading; only Class 1 citizens were permitted to do so. Like a knowledge of Sanskrit or Latin, reading was a purely ornamental skill, since all necessary information was available in other forms. At the G. C. Academy Arn had elected to substitute reading for the minor in "the arts" required by the curriculum; but he was one of the very few at the school who had done so.

He entered the Record Building through the long, underground tunnel that led out of the Class 4 sector. The guard at the inner door directed him to the Fourth Class Listening Room, just beyond the Vocatorium, where the Class 4 school sessions were in progress. An attendant glanced at his card, and directed him to the cubbyholes where the discs on rocket converters were filed.

As soon as he was alone, Arn slipped into another section and took down the platdiscs of general history, feeding them into an unused player. He clamped the outlets over his ears, and sat on the hard, wooden bench. For more than an hour he listened to the history of the past two centuries. He found nothing significant that he did not already know. Two hundred years before, the popular conception of the Homoid was identical with the present hysteria.

He listened to the story of the Homoid invasion. The World State had been nearly destroyed in an attack which had laid waste all the major cities of the world, and torn up the continental coastlines so that civilization had never again returned to those regions. But isolated groups of men had survived; they had retaliated against the invader with sabotage, the stealthy destruction of the Homoid interplanetary rockets. Unable to halt the depredation, the Homoids had suddenly taken fright and fled, leaving thousands of their number behind on

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the shattered planet. *"As men began to rebuild their cities, the Homoids among them created a problem —"* The voice stopped and a shrill whine filled out the rest of the platdisc.

The final sentence made no sense. It was half a thought; the rest must have been destroyed by careless handling of the recording. Annoyed, Arn played through a second history of the invasion, and then a third, for on each platdisc the same thing happened. At some indeterminable time during the past two centuries, the recordings had been deliberately erased.

That lost information, then, was the thing he wanted. It was the real origin of the Homoid fear. He turned to the visireel reconstruction of the invasion, and he saw very realistic pictures of the world-wide catastrophe, but in none of them a clear view of either the Homoids or their ships.

There was a chance that pre-invasion history might give him a clue, but the older platdiscs and visireels were disappointingly monotonous accounts of the Golden Age of the World State, of prosperous, marble cities, untroubled by any fear of invasion. He saw reconstructed pictures of the old ruins — the glittering cities of Paris and London, Moscow and New York, all the legendary names out of the past. There was the familiar picture of Philadelphia, where the World State had been founded at the beginning of the 20th century. Hanging in the air over the white, marble buildings were the sky-cars from all the fabulous cities of the earth. The same scene was stamped in miniature on the currency of the World State, and a large painting of it had hung, dusty and venerated, in the G. C. Academy.

Arn made the same observation that he had so many times before: the sky-cars over Philadelphia were identical to those still being built by Arn Rockets. The science of rocketeering had made very little progress since the 1st of January, 1900.

"You were assigned for a skill brushup?"

Arn looked up quickly. The attendant-librarian stood frowning above the playing machine.

"Yes," Arn replied. "I guess — I guess I got the wrong platdiscs by mistake."

"So it seems." The attendant scooped up the records angrily. "A Class 4 does not listen to the histories. Come; I'll show you the skill discs you want."

The attendant designated the proper section and, while he watched,

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Arn made a show of withdrawing the records. But as soon as he was alone again, he scurried for the incline and ran to the crowded, unused basement storerooms, where the ancient books were kept. All the visireels and platdiscs had been made since the invasion, he realized; and he already knew that some of them had been erased. It occurred to him that the printed books might have a clue to the history which had been wiped out of the records.

IN THE DIM light he thumbed through dusty, aging volumes, many so fragile they fell apart when he opened them. The books were not shelved in any kind of order, except convenience of size, and it was some minutes before he found a volume of history.

The title was bewildering, *The History of the Second World War.* Did that indicate that there had been two Homoid invasions, rather than one? He chose the book because it was filled with pictures. Arn could read, but his speed and comprehension were on the level of a primary schoolboy. He thought the pictures would be a help.

The date of the book was almost half a century after the founding of the World State, in 1900, yet it seemed to recount a war between men from different parts of the earth. The groups had unfamiliar names — Russians, Nazis, Americans, Japanese. Nowhere did Arn find any mention of a World State, or a hint that one had existed. Cities bearing the familiar names were pictured, but they bore no resemblance to the reconstructions on the visireels.

Arn threw the book aside. It could not have been history, but one of the fanciful story books people had amused themselves with before the invention of the Storyscreen.

His bewilderment increased when he found another history which told the same sorry tale of conflict. Men had been in no position to meet or defeat a Homoid invasion; they had been too busy slaying each other. Nor had they ever created a World State, or built the fairy tale cities of the Golden Age. Philadelphia and San Francisco, Birmingham and Bombay — none was ever as beautiful as Desert City or Middleport, Kansas.

But now there was a World State. Men could not have created it; yet it existed. In the midst of their internal fratricide, men had somehow met and destroyed a Homoid invasion, and immediately afterward the present World State had suddenly existed.

After the fact, they had taken the trouble to go backward in history

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and falsify it. Why? To make the World State seem an established reality? That wouldn't matter, when it had functioned for two centuries.

With an amazing ease the facts took order. Arn had a workable hypothesis. He threw back his head and laughed — with an intense, hysterical bitterness. And he had thought he could explain the truth! No wonder no Homoid was seen in the visireel pictures; no wonder the quiet voice on the platdisc had said they created a problem!

A hand fell on Arn's shoulder. He whirled, to face the assistant librarian, grim-jawed and furious.

"So a Class 4 can read." The man moved slowly, ominously toward Arn through the dusty gloom.

"Wait! I can tell you —"

"Take off your coat."

Trapped, Arn ripped out his platinum energizer. "All right; I'm Michael Arn. But I want you to listen to me. I know the truth about the Homoids; I found it in these books. You —"

"Homoids always lie." Ignoring the energizer, the librarian continued to move toward him.

"No! You can read it yourself!"

"Read?" The librarian was indignant. "I've had no time to learn such nonsense; neither have you."

"We're frightened about nothing, all of us!"

As the man closed in, Arn fired; he used the full strength of the blast, but the librarian merely relaxed into a surprised paralysis. The charge in the tiny weapon, then, was nearly exhausted; it would not serve Arn again. Nonetheless, as a matter of habit, he tucked it into his pocket as he ran toward the tunnel.

Fortunately the assistant librarian had come to the basement alone, obviously intending to earn the reward and change in class status for himself. Arn had ten minutes — possibly twenty — before the librarian would recover from the paralysis and spread the alarm. In that time, Arn had to cover as much distance as he could.

The simplest expedient now seemed to be to return to the Arn estate. A predictable decision, after all? Possibly, but also inevitable. Arn's only chance for safety lay in forcing Carla and her father to admit the accusation was a lie. Arn knew he could drag a confession from a girl and an old man; if not, he could temporize by offering Carla marriage — anything to make a workable solution. Afterward,

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if he could get the pursuit called off, he could do something to destroy the fantastic Homoid delusion.

V

ARN RAN at top speed through the empty corridors of the Record Building, but he had to slow to an inconspicuous walk as he emerged into the Fourth Class sector. It was after dark, and the factories were closed. Patient lines of workers moved slowly into the communal kitchens on the boulevard.

To Arn it seemed an ideal time to slip unnoticed through the opening he had cut in the electrified wall. No police bulletin had yet suggested that he had escaped into the slums; he had to take a chance that the hole had not been discovered. It was highly probable. On one side of the fence was the park, seldom used during the day; on the other, the crowded tenements. When the workers poured out of their rooms at dawn, they had been too preoccupied with the thought of food to observe anything else; they would not return to their hovels until after nightfall.

But as he moved out of the tunnel into the hot, stinking gloom, a hand closed over his arm. He jerked back involuntarily.

"Why so skittish?"

He looked down into the leering face of Wanda 972. "Oh, it's you."

"Yeah. Figured they sent you up here, so I came over to meet you. So's I could show you my room."

"I haven't eaten yet, and —"

"They don't give you much on jus' a Record Building card." She came closer to him, sliding her filthy hand languidly beneath his coat. "But I might let you have mine. I might."

Instinctively he understood her intention as her fingers closed on the fringe of his coat. At the same time he saw the unsmiling crowd closing in behind her. As he pulled out of her grasp, he remembered the distinctly unpleasant fate of Ruthy 19's friend. Wanda 972 gasped in surprise, and then cried out. Arn broke through a food line; the mob followed.

He swung into the darkness of an empty alley, slowly outdistancing the pounding, naked feet. He doubled back, listening while the throng pelted past; and he ran for the wall. Before he located the opening,

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he saw the reflection on the sky of glaring light, as the emergency riot lamps went on above the boulevards. The alarm bell began to clang at intervals.

Arn knew that either the librarian or the mob had given warning to the police. The smooth whir of motors echoed hollowly in the distant alleys.

As he plunged, panting, through the opening in the metal wall, he heard again the noise of running feet, and the angry baying of the mob. The Second-third Class park, by good fortune, was empty.

But as Arn darted across the apartment zone, he passed a man and woman in the street. They both screamed and fled. The shrilling alarm in the apartment strip joined the din before Arn reached the second barrier — and found the strands of the paralyzer fence repaired.

In the distance Arn heard the throb of naked feet again. Wanda 972 had led a growing mob of Class 4s through the gap in the wall. With a shock, Arn realized that this precisely duplicated the revolution in which his parents had been killed when he was a child. No one then had been able to guess how the restraining barrier had been pierced; but popular opinion had blamed the Homoids.

Arn laughed, again with consuming bitterness. They could come to the same foolish conclusion this time, and with no more reason.

The din of the mob moved closer. He was trapped unless he could pass the paralyzer fence. The charge in his energizer was nearly spent, but it was his only possible means of snapping the wires. He aimed the weapon carefully and pressed the trigger.

Nothing happened.

He saw the black wave of the mob, like a rolling finger of lava, swirl into the park. Helpless, he darted away from the fence, hiding under an artistic arrangement of granite boulders.

The screaming faces in the mob throbbed with the fanatic fury of hatred. They were no longer simply pursuing a Homoid; they were no longer functioning as individuals, but as a destructive mass, achieving the reality of the violence they hatched in midnight dreams in their lonely, dirty hovels. Without pausing, the mass swung against the paralyzer wires, smashing them, pouring through into the estate zone.

When they had passed, Arn wormed out of his hiding place and walked through the gap in the fence. A score of paralyzed men and

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women lay on the ground, those who had been in the front of the mob; they had paid the toll for the passage of the others.

AHEAD OF HIM Arn heard the sound of voices, behind a pounding of feet as a second wave of Class 4s poured through the park. Every area of the city was screaming with alarm bells. Every street throbbed with the sound of the motorized police columns, the clatter of their weapons.

Beside a park way-station Arn found an overturned pneumocar. The man who had been driving it lay dead on the grass, his throat twisted and his body torn into ribbons by slashing fingernails. Arn pushed the car back into the tube and set the dials for the Arn landing.

Leaving the artificial quiet at the heart of the hurricane, between the two waves of the mob, Arn outdistanced the first violence of the storm. He entered the Arn estate, from the private pneumotube station, while the fury of the mob was still lapping at the neighboring estate.

He ran up the curving stairway, into the baroque splendor of his columned bedroom. With shaking fingers he turned through his wardrobe, hunting for a renewal charge for his energizer. The chaos of the advancing Class 4s came closer. He wondered if it had been like this sixteen years ago, when his parents were murdered in the revolution.

No, not quite. For now the walls were armed with hidden energizers, aimed at the lawn below. And this time he knew the origin of the mass fear. It was necessary only to hold the mob back long enough to explain it to them.

He rolled back the glass-like wall that opened on the balcony. Already the outer fringe of the mob was below him.

"Michael!"

Arn whirled, holding his energizer. In the semi-darkness at the back of the room Uncle Fred stood beside the open door, Carla close behind him.

"Come in." He motioned belligerently with his weapon.

"You shouldn't have come back here, Michael!"

"You're Homoid! The police —"

Arn laughed brutally. "Let's be honest, Carla. You know what you did, as well as I do." The sudden crying of the mob drowned her

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reply. She wrung her hands in anguish. He laughed again and added, "But you won't get what you're after; you see, I know what the Homoids are."

"The truth, Michael?" Oddly, her face seemed to brighten.

"Yes. I've read the old books in the Record Building."

"But they don't —" Her face paled. "No, Michael; you *don't* understand."

He gestured toward the mob. "Listen to what I have to tell them." He strode to the edge of the balcony and cried for silence. Instead of quieting them, his appearance merely aroused their greater fury. Repeated bawling of *"Homoid!"* surged over the upturned faces.

Arn threatened them with his energizer. It did no good. When he saw that some of the men were trying to climb the balcony, he fired the wall energizers into the throng. But at the last minute he had a revulsion at such pointless murder, and he aimed the charge over their heads.

For a moment the angry voices stilled and the blank, emotionless faces stared up at him.

Arn jerked off his gray coat, pointing to the wound on his shoulder. "Of course I'm Homoid," he shouted. "But the joke is this, my friends: you are, too. We all are; we always have been."

BEHIND HIM he heard Carla gasp. The mob seemed to shrink away from him, but still their silence held. "Two centuries ago the Earth people were engaged in one of their interminable wars against each other, when the Homoids invaded their planet. We never smashed their cities or tore up their coastline. They had already done that themselves. We simply finished the job and wiped them out. They weren't capable of creating a World State; we were. But for some reason, later on, we chose to pretend our civilization was theirs. I think I can even guess the answer to that one, too."

"Homoid lies!" a woman shouted. A chorus of voices took up her cry, but silence came again when Arn fired the energizers once more over their heads.

"Come back inside, Michael!" Carla whispered. "You don't know what you're doing. They won't understand you; they aren't really hearing a word you say. The fear is too ingrained; it's part of their souls."

Arn turned back to the throng. "We came here from another planet

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— a corps of pioneers, perhaps, or an army of exploration. Whatever our reasons, when we had such an easy victory we wanted the Earth for ourselves. We took over the hulk of their language, their customs, their whole dead civilization and made it our own. But we were disobeying the people who had sent us — the Homoids — our own culture — and we were always afraid they would come again, in retaliation. So we erected the energizer domes over our brand new cities, we rewrote part of the Earth's history to suit ourselves, and we taught our children the Homoid fear — fear of themselves and their own kind!"

"Homoid!" a shrill voice screamed, and it was like a signal. A rain of stones and gravel hit the balcony. The mob began to storm the wall.

Frantically Carla pulled Arn into the bedroom, closing the transparent walls. She seemed to be weeping. "The truth, Michael! You said you knew the truth!" Suddenly she began to laugh uncontrolably, until Uncle Fred cracked his bony knuckles across her jaw.

"There's a sky-car in the Landing Rack," he said crisply. "The Codex will pass us through the screen."

"But we can't take Michael —"

"Yes, Carla, we can. I think he's finished his re-education."

"Wait a minute!" Arn protested. "You betrayed me once before, and if you think now —"

"Don't be a fool," Uncle Fred said. "If you like, you can stay here and die, the way your parents did — and for exactly the same reason. They — the others — planned the revolution that killed your father. We had no sky-car here then; he couldn't get away."

The mob was on the balcony. The transparent wall began to shatter. Fred Collins and Carla ran for the door; Arn followed.

THEIR TINY sky-car shot up out of the chaotic city. Fred Collins put the dials on manual control and headed for the ruins on the coast. Carla settled beside Michael and smiled at him; he stared back stonily.

"I think you'll forgive me in time, Michael."

His eyebrows arched. "It seems to me a little more than simple forgiveness is involved."

Uncle Fred leaned back from the pilot's seat. "We expected you to have enough of your father's heritage to get out of it with a whole

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skin; they couldn't have educated everything out of you, back there in Kansas."

"And, regardless of what happened to you," Carla added, "we couldn't let them have the radial-rocket."

"Them! Who?"

"The governing council."

Uncle Fred intervened again. "Michael, you inherited your position in Arn Rockets, didn't you?"

"Naturally."

"So does every Class 1, and that includes each member of the council. They have from the beginning. They're the only ones who've always known the truth. They use it to keep themselves in power. It was a council, generations ago, that made the first alteration of history. The mass fear — the wound on the shoulder — it became an easy way to eliminate a potential enemy and to maintain the status quo."

"They know we're Homoid?"

"Oh, no, Michael!" Carla reached for his hand; reluctantly he did not draw it back. "You had all the facts; but you misinterpreted them. Men were always fighting among themselves, true. In their last war they smashed up their civilization completely. The Homoids came to help them rebuild. They've done the same thing on so many other planets. This is the only place where they failed."

"Failed? But we have a World State, and men did not. We have large cities like Desert City. We have —"

"A caste system that perpetuates evil and superstition, and imprisons man's soul. Only men could have turned the Homoid dream into such a nightmare; they did it once before with Christianity."

"But what happened?"

"The Homoids gave men new laws and built them new cities. They channeled rivers into the desert, and converted wastelands into garden spots. They showed men how to use their resources without depleting them, how to rebuild their planet instead of destroying it piecemeal with war and violence. And when men had learned everything the Homoids could teach them, they turned on the invaders and wiped them out. For two centuries a few Homoids have survived in the ruins of the old Earth cities, scratching out a bare existence in the desolation. They gave themselves two hundred years to try to teach men not to blunder."

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"Then the fear is real? The Homoids will attack us again and retaliate for the thankless ingratitude of —"

"No, Michael; to them revenge is a petty emotion. They have built successfully everywhere in the universe. Why should they be angered by the failure of man on his lonely speck of dust? The Homoid fear comes because men project their emotions to strangers; and now they have an enormous guilt complex, too — two centuries old."

"Then that's why it was so important to keep my radial-rocket out of the hands of the council."

"If men tried to impose their burlesque of civilization on other worlds —" Carla shuddered. "And there was something else, Michael. I wanted the Homoids to have your plans. Their time is up; with the material they can find in the ruins, they can build an escape rocket from your design."

"You said I'd forgive you." He smiled and drew her into his arms. The sky-car nosed toward a desert of jagged rubble, gleaming in the moonlight. Arn squirmed with a growing, inner discomfort.

"Homoids are down there?" he asked.

"Yes. Waiting for us."

"I wish — after what you've told me, Carla, it's going to be awkward, meeting them."

"They're no different from ourselves, Michael."

"That isn't quite what I meant. I'll be ashamed —"

"They hold no grudges. Don't you understand yet, Michael?"

Uncle Fred broke in, as the sky-car settled gently into a bed of gray ash. "Some of the Homoids still move among men, working in the cities, trying to undo this sham men have made of the Homoid dream. Even some of the Class 1 families, Michael, striving to the very last —"

The sky-car door swung open. Arn saw tall, dark figures moving toward them out of the choking desolation.

"Families like the Arns," Uncle Fred whispered. "We thought we had lost you, Michael, when they sent you away to the G. C. Academy. You were supposed to have been killed in the rebellion, but something went wrong and you survived. So the council did the next best thing, and sentenced you to the government school."

Carla took Arn's hand and led him out of the sky-car. "Come and meet our people, Michael."

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They knew it would come, and they knew what had failed to halt a decline in the past. After such knowledge, could there be a renaissance?

NOVELET

DECLINE

by William L. Bade

Together, Huebner and Murphy could avert a new dark age.

THE day smelled of autumn. October sunshine slanted down from a turquoise sky onto the parkland. The lawns were still green, but the trees and shrubbery glowed with yellows and reds and ochres. Dry leaves rustled in every breeze. Elaborate fountains danced in the distance, their

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swaying parabolic streams glittering tirelessly in the sunlight.

It was the splendor of nature brought to full bloom by the knowledge of man. As he sat drinking in the scene, Hugo Huebner was suddenly conscious that during the past hour he had scarcely given his surroundings a glance. It had been an hour of disappointment and mounting anxiety. He had come to meet — and to size up — the three men who were now sitting with him in the shade of the giant oak. Well, they were a disappointing lot. His old friends in the Group, whose places these men now occupied, had all died while he was away to the stars. Except for routine collection of data, these newcomers had — by their own admission — accomplished nothing during his absence.

And yet, he was acutely aware that he needed these men desperately. Somehow, in spite of their shortcomings, he *had to* recruit them for his plan.

Huebner's brooding thought ended as William Bremer pushed his chair back and stood up. Bremer, a small man with delicate features and pale blond hair, was their host — the owner of this huge, beautifully landscaped estate.

"Gentlemen." His voice was a clear tenor. "The first reunion of the full Wyssling Group in more than forty years deserves a round of toasts. Who would like to begin?"

"Go ahead, Will," Casari rumbled. He was the dark, corpulent man sitting across the table from Huebner.

"Well, then —." They stood and raised the fragile goblets of golden '29 Moselle. Bremer gazed into the distance for a moment. "To History!"

They drank and smiled at one another. Bremer refilled the glasses.

Maurice Casari now ponderously raised his arm. The little goblet was dwarfed by his fat hairy hand. He licked his thick lips. "Gentlemen — our founder, Carl Wyssling!"

They drank again, solemnly. A faint breeze rustled the dry leaves of the oak, some of which came somersaulting down. William Bremer drove a corkscrew into the stopper of a second bottle and grasping the flash by the neck, pulled strongly with his other hand. The stopper came out with a sharp *plop!* and he poured again.

Now Howard Applequist cleared his throat and blinked behind his spectacles. His voice was dry, and yet faintly pompous. "I want to — ahem! — to propose a toast to the Group's most distinguished living

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member. Gentlemen — I give you the man who, one hundred years ago, brought the theory of cultural dynamics to completion."

Applequist smiled and bowed to the anthropologist. "Welcome back from the stars, Dr. Huebner."

Huebner grinned his thanks as they drank to him.

"Now it's your turn, Hugo," Bremer smiled after filling the goblets for a fourth time.

Huebner was suddenly tense as the thought came that *this was his chance.* He stood gazing at the horizon for almost a minute, formulating a toast which would serve his purpose. The others started to fidget. Finally he said slowly, "I give you — Shakespeare and Sylvester — Gauss and Grothe — Wolfe and Wyssling. The Ninth Symphony of Beethoven and the Basin Street Blues . . . . I give you that from which we borrow our souls and drink our life —.

"Gentlemen — the Great Western Culture. *May it not die!*"

The others looked startled, but they drank the toast. Maurice Casari put down his glass, wiped his lips with the back of an index finger, and grinned broadly at Huebner. "A pious wish," he rumbled, "but scarcely a hope, as *we* know . . ."

"Definitely a hope!" Huebner contradicted him. "In fact, you might say — an intention!"

The three of them looked at him with raised-eyebrow expressions. Finally Bremer said quietly, " I have to confess I don't follow you, Hugo."

'Let's sit down, then, and I'll explain."

THEY SETTLED into their chairs. Huebner leaned forward, arms crossed and elbows resting on the table. "Have you ever wondered," he asked, looking from one face to another, "why Carl Wyssling started this research?"

"To study History," Bremer replied with the manner of one stating an axiom.

Huebner shook his head. "That was the means, not the purpose."

"It's an end in itself," Applequist stated.

"No, I say! The purpose of this Group, which it is now capable of fulfilling, is to understand History in order *to prevent the fall of the Western Culture!*"

"What!" Casari erupted.

"That's not true!" Applequist protested.

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Bremer sat looking very thoughtful. After a while, he said, "I've read Wyssling's notes, Hugo, and I don't recall finding that purpose stated anywhere in them. Instead, he keeps emphasizing that we mustn't interfere . . ."

"Wyssling," Huebner stated, "emphasized very correctly that the Group would have to give up *temporarily* the object of influencing History, *in order not to disturb the system being studied.* Well, we're through studying the system; we understand how it functions. To date, the predictions Cathy Kembleson and I made a hundred years ago have come out on the nose. I say now is the time to use our knowledge to save the Culture!"

Casari leaned forward to glare across the table. "Who do you think you are, anyway?" he demanded. "The only concrete profit we have from two hundred years of work is a history of the next millenium — and now you want to destroy that, to make scrap paper out of all our predictions . . ."

Huebner spat on the ground beside the table and stared bitterly at the fat man. "What kind of a creature are you? You *know* what those predictions are. Do you *want* them to be fulfilled? Of course, you know your own skin is safe — the 'golden age' will last another two centuries. But you know what follows — hundreds of years of bloody civil war, military dictatorship, anarchy and collapse. And then the depths of ignorance, filth, and misery . . . If you want *that* to happen — then I say damn you!" His hands were trembling and his face was flushed hot.

"Be that as it may," Bremer said coolly, "I question your assumption that we can change the History-to-come. The destiny of a culture is rigid." He smiled and quoted:

"The tide of history is flooding full;
Against that flow can no man stand."

"Poppycock!" Huebner exploded. "That idea has been hanging around — an apology for human laziness — ever since Spengler; and it's never been proved. I don't believe it."

Bremer's face froze. His voice became hard and coldly deliberate. "Your disbelief, Dr. Huebner, does not constitute a proof to the contrary."

The anthropologist was suddenly aghast as he realized what a

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wrong turn the discussion had taken. Why, he was actually antagonizing these men! He would have to erase that bad impression immediately, and establish a more friendly atmosphere.

He looked straight into Bremer's eyes and made his voice low and humble. "Please excuse me for becoming argumentative, Will; I feel very strongly about these matters, and I was carried away."

After a moment, Bremer smiled. "Quite all right, Hugo. I understand."

"Now, I do have a reason for not believing in a rigid destiny. The last time I was on Earth, I spent five years learning some higher mathematics. And while I was on Beta Hydri IV, *I gave the entire theory a mathematical formulation!*"

They stared at him unmoved — uncomprehending. A breeze rustled the leaves of the great oak above them. "Well," Bremer said sympathetically, "that's nice, but I don't see what it has to do with changing destiny."

"Listen," Huebner said, "you can't realize — until you've actually seen it — the . . . the *fantastic* increase in scope and power which a mathematical formulation gives. Already I've solved problems no one would ever have dared tackle before, simply because they're too complex for the human mind to handle in verbal form. The problem of regenerating a culture is one of those. My calculations show that we can set off a renaissance within the next century — assuming that we can find good men, train them in historical theory, and maneuver them into positions of power. We can do it — and we have to do it!"

"Pardon me for being so skeptical, Hugo," Bremer said, "but how on Earth do you go about expressing the soul of a culture by a means of a number?"

"You don't, of course. But then most of modern mathematics doesn't deal with numbers, anyway . . . I found that problems in cultural dynamics can be handled by formulating eigenstates of an operator in an infinite-dimensional topological space."

Casari snorted loudly. "Do those words mean anything, or are you just putting on a show?"

Before Huebner could reply, Bremer broke in with another objection. "But Hugo — reforms imposed from above never work. Remember Ikhnaton and Augustus. Why, that's just what Murphy is trying right now!"

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The anthropologist shook his head. "That's a false analogy. Those rulers did not understand cultural dynamics; we do! I tell you, all we have to do is find the right men and use them to apply the right cultural stimuli . . ."

"You can't do this to us!" Applequist's voice was almost a scream. He sprang to his feet and stood, hands and lips trembling, eyes frantic behind his spectacles. "You can't drag us into your crazy scheme! This is treason, and the SSP will get you — and then we'll all be done for!" He turned in appeal to the others. "Don't let him! Stop him before he gets us all killed!"

Huebner sat staring in pure astonishment.

Bremer uttered a quiet command. "Howard — sit down." Applequist collapsed onto his chair.

"Count me out, too," Casari rumbled. "I'm a research man, not a revolutionary; I don't even want to associate with anyone planning to overthrow the government."

Huebner stared at him. Everything was going wrong! "All right, damn it!" he exploded. "If you don't have the guts for it, I can't use you anyway." He turned to Bremer and looked the question. Chill dismay flooded through him as the slight, blond man slowly shook his head.

"Sorry, Hugo. You may be right. You're brilliant, I know — I'm inclined to trust your calculations; but I'm afraid that going into a political conspiracy would be too much bother for me."

"Bother!" Huebner exclaimed. "What the devil do you mean by that?"

Bremer shrugged. "Thanks to my father's fortune, I'm able to experience what I consider a good life. Joining up with you on this project would interfere with that — so I choose not to do so."

Huebner's shoulders slumped. Wearily, he stood up. There was no anger left in him — only a heavy despair. He shrugged. "If that's how you feel, I guess there's nothing I can do to change it."

DURING THE walk back to the villa, there was no conversation. Applequist appeared to be lost in some gloomy daydream of disaster. Casari lumbered along, frowning in thought. They strode past the sparkling, laughing fountains, followed a leaf-strewn path which lay in the shade of a tall hedgerow, and finally emerged into view of the house.

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Bremer's villa was a conscious architectural archaism, embodying a design which had been novel two centuries earlier. It was a low structure of brick and bright artificial stones, built entirely above ground and featuring a flat, markedly overhanging roof. Its various sections spread over several acres.

Their feet resounded on stone paving, and then they were in an entrance hall. Huebner dully shook hands with the others and entered the adjoining RT chamber. The door closed itself behind him and he dialed the number of his community. The exchange light flashed green immediately, the door opened, and he stepped out into the lobby of the Brandyville Community Center, more than two thousand miles from Bremer's place.

In his apartment, he sank into a chair and shut his eyes to think. He went over the preceding meeting in his mind. Finally, he decided that his failure had not been due entirely to his own tactlessness. The character of the Group had changed during his absence. Bremer, Casari and Applequist probably would not have committed themselves to the project, however they might have been approached.

Well — he would just have to resign himself to doing the job without them, difficult though that would be. He would have to build his own organization . . .

He frowned and shifted restlessly in the chair as an impulse surged through him. Why not start the new organization today — now? After all, he was as sure of Foudray as he could of anyone . . . He thought of all his discussions with the boy, tried unsuccessfully to recall any hint of untrustworthiness.

By the stars, he'd do it! The decision was like a tonic. He sprang to his feet and strode across the room to the visiphone. After looking up a number in his memo book, he dialed and waited. The face of a young man appeared on the screen. "Solar Polytechnic Institute, Dorm S."

"I'd like to talk to Paul Foudray, if he's there."

A minute later, there appeared the face of a boy with abundant dark hair and startling black eyebrows. "Oh — hello, Professor Huebner."

"Hello, Paul. Are you very busy?" When the boy shook his head, Huebner went on, "Well, then — could you come over here? I'm at my apartment."

"Sure, I'll be right over. Only I've forgotten where it is . . ."

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"Community number 778-966, apartment 313."

"I'll be right there."

A COUPLE of minutes later, there came a knock at the door. Huebner leaped up and opened it, grinned at the tall lank youngster standing in the corridor.

"Come in, Paul!"

"What was it you wanted, Professor?"

"Here, sit down . . ."

They faced one another across Huebner's desk, which as usual was littered with papers, books, ashtrays, a slide rule, the bronze dagger from Beta Hydri IV that he used as a letter opener, and miscellaneous erasings and pipe ashes. With Foudray's clear, candid eyes on him, Huebner felt a little awkward. How the devil should he begin? To gain time, he filled and stoked his pipe.

"Paul," he said finally, puffing smoke, "I've known you for two months now. You're brilliant. And I think you're trustworthy."

The boy said nothing. His expression became slightly more interrogatory.

"Paul, I want to tell you the story of one of the greatest pieces of research ever done; but I've got to have an absolute promise of secrecy from you. Do you understand? You have to swear never to tell *anybody* about this."

Foudray nodded. His expression was noncommittal, but his voice was loud and clear. "I promise."

And by the stars! — Huebner thought — the boy had better mean that. If he turned out to be a tattletale, the Solar Security Police would make a swift end to Hugo Huebner, the Wyssling Group *in toto*, and the salvation of the Western Culture . . . Well — one couldn't build a conspiracy without taking risks.

"Paul — two hundred years ago there lived a man named Carl Wyssling. He was a professional historian — a professor at an American university. And he was interested in the problem of *predicting history!*"

Foudray's eyes widened as the significance penetrated. He opened his mouth, then shut it again without uttering a sound.

"The idea that historical development was an accessible field of study was in the air then, at the middle of the twentieth century. Oswald Spengler had published his *Decline of the West* in 1918.

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The first volume of Toynbee's *Study of History* had appeared in 1933. Pitirim A. Sorokin had brought out the first volume of his *Social and Cultural Dynamics* in 1937.

"I know you've never heard of those books before — but they had quite an impact two centuries ago. Wyssling spent twenty years working on the problem of historical development. He actually achieved a better theory of history than any then in existence, though he never published anything about it. He came to realize that the problem was too big for any one man, that human life is too short . . .

"So he founded an organization — *the Wyssling Group.* He recruited three young men: a historian, a social psychologist, and a cultural anthropologist. The Group worked in secret, never publishing results so as not to disturb the system it was studying. Wyssling died in 1971, but the Group went on — creating, testing, and rejecting hypotheses, discovering one by one the observables of cultural dynamics and the principles governing social change. The data piled up decade after decade . . .

"I joined the Group in 2039. You may remember, that was the year David Kiester was assassinated. Resonance transport had come in on a big scale while I was a boy. Damnedest mess you ever saw. Fifteen million people out of work . . .

"I was a cultural anthropologist with a brand new Ph.D. I thought the world was going to hell — which it was — and I wanted to do something about it. When the Group propositioned me, I decided that was my chance."

Foudray nodded briefly.

He puffed on his pipe. It had gone out. He laid it on the table and resumed: "There was a woman in the Group then, a brilliant good-looker named Cathy Kembleson. She'd been in for about ten years when I joined. We two decided that there was enough data on hand. By 2048 we had an integrated theory that fitted everything we knew. I worked out what should happen in the Western Culture from 2050 to 2200 on the basis of that theory.

"Then I got curious. I wanted to see how well the theory worked. So I made an anthropological field trip to Beta Hydri IV via the interstellar RT system. That's a distance of 21 light years each way — a Lorentz time lag of 42 years for the round trip.

"I got back to Earth in 2094. The War of the Executives was

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getting under way; so far the predictions of the theory had checked out."

Paul Foudray suddenly stood up and began pacing around the room, eyes gleaming. "This is really something!"

Huebner grinned and nodded. "I stuck around on Earth for ten years, that time. That was when I learned my math. I'd decided to try for a mathematical formulation of the theory. In 2104 I left for Beta Hydri again, and while I was there I found the mathematical formulation. I stayed extrasolar for two years, perfecting it and solving problems with it. Then I came back. That was last August.

"So far there haven't been any discrepancies between the predictions and what's actually happened."

There was silence for a moment. "Boy!" Foudray erupted. "That's what I call resonating!" He stood staring at Huebner. "*What happens from now on?* I mean . . ."

"Sometime between 1900 and 2000," Huebner said slowly, "the Western Culture started to decline. That process is going on now, and it will continue. I know that sounds strange to you. Right now we have a unified solar system under the Solar Corporation, and the most advanced technology of all time. But this decline is a change in *men*. They are becoming less creative and more — selfish. Eventually, the material aspects of the culture will start to decline, too; but that time is two centuries and more in the future. Meanwhile, Solco will rule in peace and security . . ."

"Well, that's a relief!" Foudray exclaimed.

Huebner frowned. "Paul — the physical collapse of a great civilization is a truly terrible thing. It is blood — and disease — and hunger — and cruel tyranny — and human hope being beaten to death with a club — and it lasts for hundreds of years. Its end-product is a semi-barbaric, pyramid-shaped society in which the people at the top live only for power, and those at the bottom don't have anything to live for . . ."

"Well, I'm just glad I'm living now, and not then."

Huebner leaned forward and looked grimly into the boy's eyes. "But that collapse doesn't have to happen."

"What . . . ? You just said . . ."

"What I just described *will* happen — unless we prevent it. It's within *our* power to do so!"

Foudray was frowning and playing idly with the hilt of the Hydrian

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dagger on the desk. Finally, without looking up, he said, "What is it you want of me?"

"I want to teach you cultural dynamics. I want to help you rise to an influential position in the Solar Corporation. And eventually, though perhaps not in my lifetime, I will want you to take certain actions which will help in setting off a renaissance in the Western Culture."

The boy sat scowling at the desk. After a moment, his lips twitched in a smile and he looked up. "I accept," he said.

Huebner breathed a sigh of relief. Foudray clearly was not yet used to thinking in terms of generations and centuries — but he could be educated into it.

The project was under way.

THE NEXT MORNING, when he arrived at his office in the Solar Polytechnic Institute, he found a note in his letter box requesting him to appear at the office of the Dean of Faculties at ten o'clock. What kind of trouble — he wondered — had he got himself into now?

The nine o'clock bell rang, and he hurried to his scheduled algebra class. He gave a quiz that morning. Shortly after he had written the problem on the blackboard, one of the students put up his hand.

"Professor Huebner, can this be worked with any of the formulas in the book?"

"Not directly; there's a two-step derivation . . ."

The student looked disgusted, wadded his paper into a ball, and threw it on the floor. There was suddenly a breathless, expectant silence in the classroom. Huebner turned and stared absently at the blackboard for about a minute. When he heard excited whispers behind his back, he turned slowly and surveyed the class, then glanced at his watch.

"Collect papers in two minutes," he remarked.

There was a concerted gasp and a flurry of activity as most of the students scrambled to finish their papers.

One of these days — he thought — he would have to face a real mutiny in this class.

At ten o'clock Huebner presented himself at the Dean's office.

Floyd Smithers, Dean of Faculties at Soltech, was a flabby bald-headed specimen with two extra chins and a mustache. "Dr. Hueb-

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ner," he said, looking down at papers on his desk, "the Solar Executive has become very concerned about what he regards as a decrease in the competence-level of recent graduates of the Solar Corporation's technical schools. Yesterday we received a *very* strongly worded directive to remedy the situation."

Huebner raised his eyebrows.

"We were somewhat doubtful about hiring you from the beginning," the Dean said. "After all, you had had no formal training in engineering or physics . . . To be quite blunt, Dr. Huebner, your teaching has not been satisfactory."

"Not satisfactory?" Huebner flared. *"How?"*

"You seem to be incapable of following the prescribed courses in engineering mathematics. Instead, you present material outside the curriculum, material which has no bearing on the classification examinations . . . We have had complaints about you from quite a number of students."

"Good heavens!" Huebner exploded. "I've only tried to stimulate those dullards to do a little thinking for themselves . . ."

"To disregard the work they're supposed to do, you mean!" Smithers lifted a sheet of paper from one of the stacks on his desk. "Here's an example of your work. A boy named Paul Foudray in your eleven o'clock calculus class. He was a perfectly satisfactory student until he came under your influence. Since then his other teachers have reported that his work has become very careless and incomplete." He looked up at Huebner with hard eyes. "We'll save him. He's getting a strong reprimand today, and he'll come back into line . . ."

Huebner caught himself on the verge of a tirade. He must not risk bringing any additional trouble to Foudray.

"The Solar Executive's directive is quite explicit," Smithers said. "The average score of the students on the classification examinations must be raised; students who have been neglecting their work must be warned, and deadwood on the staff must be eliminated."

They glared at one another. "Dr. Huebner, you're fired!"

THREE HOURS LATER, in his apartment, Huebner dumped his lunch dishes into the disposal chute and lit his pipe. The loss of his job wouldn't hurt him personally. He had enough money to get along. But the stupidity of it! If this was the Solar Executive's idea

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of how to get better technicians and scientists, then it was no wonder that competence standards were going to the dogs . . . Of course, Murphy and Smithers were just part of the current cultural pattern — part of the decline of the West.

He hoped that Paul Foudray would not suffer too much from this new get-tough policy. The boy had been spending a lot of time studying the books Huebner had given him. Maybe it would be a good idea to check up . . .

Huebner wondered if he'd made a mistake.

He dialed Soltech Dorm S on the visiphone. The student who answered was faintly apologetic.

"Foudray's not in his room, Professor. Now that I think of it, he wasn't here for lunch, either . . ."

"Thanks."

There was a knock at the door. Who the devil could that be? Huebner rose and went to see.

"Hello, Hugo." It was Maurice Casari.

"Yes?" Huebner could not prevent a shade of hostility from sounding in his voice.

"Hugo — I've spent the last day thinking about what you said yesterday, and . . . Well, I've changed my mind. I've decided that the Western Culture should be saved, and that we're the ones to do it. In other words — I'm with you!"

Huebner stood looking at the fat man. This might be a genuine change of heart, and then again — yesterday Casari had appeared as a callous egoist.

"Why don't you come in and sit down," he said finally.

"Hugo, I know I must have made a bad impression on you yesterday. Please try to understand. Your proposal was so new, and so completely at odds with the traditions of the Group, that it took me a while to see it. Now I'm in perfect agreement with you."

"I'm glad to hear it." Huebner was still uncertain. He could feel no trust for this man.

"What about the others?" he asked.

Casari shook his head. "I haven't talked with them today, but I doubt that you'll hear from them. Applequist is a coward. The strain of belonging to a secret society is too much for him. Lately his fear of the police has become pathological. And as for Will Bremer — he's an honest man. What he said about himself yesterday was

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the absolute truth. He lives for pleasure. He's a refined, self-restrained sort of Epicurean. For him, the Group is just a hobby."

Huebner abruptly came to a decision. He pulled open a side drawer in his desk, took out a small cardboard box, and opened it to show a dozen spools of microfilm.

"This is a copy of all my work on the mathematical theory of cultural dynamics," he told the dark, corpulent man. "The first spool — they're numbered, you see — starts off with a list of references to books in which the prerequisite mathematics is developed. It's going to be a big job for you to learn that stuff, Maurice, but you should do it. The theory is too important of its own right, as well as for the success of the project, to be kept in the brain of one man."

Casari took the box of film and slipped it into his pocket. "I'll start working right away — tonight. How long do you think it will take?"

"Several years, I'm afraid. But of course we can be going ahead with more concrete action in the meantime."

"What comes first?"

Huebner leaned back, hands behind his head. "We'll have to start building an organization," he said slowly. "What we need mainly are young men who are intelligent and utterly reliable. We'll have to find them, recruit them, train them, and slowly maneuver them into high positions in the Solar Corporation . . . Do you think of anybody offhand?"

Casari frowned and licked his lower lip. After a while he looked up. "I think I do," he said slowly. "I'll leave the final judgement to you, so that the decision won't be biased by my personal feelings."

"Who is it?"

"My son Lee." Casari smiled. "All questions of egotism aside, I think he's smart — and I'm sure he can be trusted . . ."

"Bring him around," Huebner said. "I'd like to meet him."

"Better," Casari replied, "why don't you come to our place for dinner sometime soon. That would be less likely to attract any kind of attention . . . How about tomorrow night."

"Fine!"

AFTER CASARI had left, Huebner sat for some time at his desk, smoking his pipe and thinking. He still was not satisfied as to the fat man's motives for changing his mind. He would have to keep

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an eye on the fellow . . . Another question: How was Paul Foudray making out with the reprimand Dean Smithers had mentioned? Perhaps he should try calling Dorm S again . . .

Huebner jerked his head around at a sudden noise. The door of his apartment was open, and two men were standing there. They had guns in their hands, pointing at him.

For a moment he stared blankly at them, uncomprehending. Then a dreadful surmise came. "SSP?" he asked.

One of the men nodded curtly.

Huebner stood up. "What do you want?" He felt absurdly calm.

"You." They started to approach.

Well — he thought — here it was at last, after all the years. They had him now. They would take him to some Solco police garrison, and the SSP interrogators would inject their effective truth drugs. Then he would babble the entire story, complete with dates, names, and addresses . . .

It hit him then. This was the end of the Wyssling Group. Also the end of all hope of saving the Western Culture.

He still felt queerly rational. It was all perfectly clear. If Hugo Huebner lived any longer, then everything that Hugo Huebner had ever done or believed in or fought for would come to an end. Therefore — Hugo Huebner must *not* live any longer.

The SSP agents were still halfway across the room. Swiftly his right hand closed on the hilt of the Hydrian dagger which lay on his desk. He jerked the weapon up to a position on a level with his chest, point inward, and got a two-handed grip on it. His arm and chest muscles tensed to begin a convulsive contraction which would drive the keen-edged bronze blade into his heart. At that instant there was the sound of a gunshot, deafening in the confines of the room, and a terrible blow shattered his left shoulder. The floor flipped up and slammed against his left side. Blinding agony flared in his shoulder and engulfed him . . .

He woke briefly to the prick of a needle. He was propped, puppet-fashion, into some sort of chair. A cocoon of bandages swathed his left chest, strapping his arm to his body. Groggily, he tried to sit up — to think what had happened and what he should do. But a pleasant numbness was enveloping him and it was easier to stay slumped in the chair and relax . . .

Then the nice men came and asked questions. They were his

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friends; he knew they were. He answered the questions gladly and fully, pleased that he was able to do even so slight a favor for these wonderful men, whom he loved . . .

There was no pain, no unpleasantness.

Afterwards, when he woke again — in a cell — he knew that it was too late to kill himself.

The end of the Wyssling Group — and it was his fault. *He* had failed.

Yet — why had the SSP come to arrest him? Somebody else must have talked first!

Who?

They gave him three days to think about it.

THE GUARDS came for him then. They dressed him in clean clothes and took him to have his three-day beard shaved off. Finally, after a trip via resonance transmitter, he found himself in a luxurious anteroom.

Casari, Bremer, and Applequist were already there, sitting in a row in chairs along one wall, under guard. They looked up at him. Despair and hatred were in their faces.

"A strange coincidence," Bremer remarked bitterly. "You contact us, and the next day we're arrested . . ."

"Quiet!" a guard snapped.

A curt gesture directed Huebner to one of the chairs. He obeyed. For the first time since his arrest, he felt hope — a strong, almost intoxicating sense that there might be at least a personal future in store for him, even yet.

Two more guards came in, escorting a tall youth with black hair and eyebrows.

Paul Foudray.

Huebner looked up at him, flooded with anguish that he had brought the brilliant young man into such peril. "Sorry, Paul . . ." The guards glared at him and he bit his lip, looked down.

A buzzer sounded. "Get up," a guard ordered. Another door opened and the policemen herded them through it. The new room was a large, expensively furnished office. Behind a giant mahogany desk, hands folded before him, sat a man in a double breasted suit. Huebner recognized the serene, almost handsome features from innumerable photographs.

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They were in the presence of the ruler of nine planets and ten major satellites, Theodore Murphy, the Solar Executive.

He motioned to the guards with a finger. "Leave the room."

Why — Huebner wondered intensely — why was he giving them *personal* attention? Surely this argued in favor of his earlier conjecture that they were being spared for some use!

There was a sound of hoarse breathing beside him. It was Casari, a huge terrified mass of flesh. Bremer, who looked apprehensive, and Applequist, who appeared to be on the point of fainting, had their eyes fixed, fascinated, on the Solar Executive.

"I have your dossiers here," Murphy said, tapping a stack of folders lying on his desk. He looked the five men over, one by one. Then —

"Dr. Huebner! You have a plan for preventing the decline and fall of our civilization." It was a statement, not a question. "And these were to be your allies."

The executive directed a somewhat cynical grin towards the anthropologist. "You're a brilliant man, Dr. Huebner, but rather deficient in judgement about people. Professor Applequist and Mr. Bremer refused to join your conspiracy. One is a coward — the other a professional hedonist. Well enough . . . But you accepted Mr. Foudray and then Mr. Casari."

He flashed a glance towards the fat man. "Mr. Casari! Why did you join Dr. Huebner?"

"I . . ." Casari licked his thick lips, sweat bursting out on his huge face. He stared down at the floor. "I . . . hoped that . . . there would be a chance for me to . . . to . . ."

"To grab some power," Murphy finished for him. "You didn't care about saving the culture, did you?"

Casari licked his lips again. "No, sir," he rumbled hoarsely.

The Solar Executive smiled at Huebner. "You see how it is. And then this child Foudray . . ." His face suddenly chilled. "Tell Dr. Huebner what you did, Foudray."

The tall boy gave the anthropologist a cool, almost indifferent glance. "I informed," he said boldly; "I reported your treasonable conspiracy to Solco."

"Why did you do that, Foudray?" Murphy prompted.

"Because I'm loyal . . ."

"Don't lie to me!" the executive snapped.

Foudray wilted visibly. The blood drained from his face and his

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lips began trembling. "Huebner got me into trouble at Soltech," he gasped. "The department chairman called me in about my grades. I got scared and mad, so I told him about the Wyssling Group . . ."

"Leave the room," Murphy ordered, "all of you except Huebner." When the others had gone to the waiting guards, he gestured and said sympathetically, "Come over here and sit down . . . Cigaret?"

The anthropologist's spirits rose. He could not suppress a wry grin as he inhaled the smoke and leaned back in the chair. His conjecture that the Solar Executive wanted something was certainly correct. But what?

Murphy carefully lit a cigar and remarked, "Having read your dossier, I feel that I know you well — and I like you, Dr. Huebner. Of that whole crowd, you were the only one who genuinely wanted to do something for our civilization."

Huebner nodded in rueful agreement.

The Solar Executive inhaled through the cigar and blew a series of precise smoke rings. "I also," he said, "should like to prevent the predicted decline from occurring. As you may know, I've already made a start at reforming our technical schools . . ."

"So that's what you want me for!" the anthropologist breathed.

The executive nodded. "Really, Dr. Huebner, if you had only come to me in the first place, this whole fuss would have been avoided. I do have the best interest of our civilization at heart. And now all the ingredients for saving it are in this room — your knowledge, and my authority to express your plans in action." His eyes met Huebner's. "How about it? Can we do business?"

Huebner flushed with excitement as the magnitude of the offer, the unprecedented opportunity which it represented, penetrated his consciousness. Knowledge, and the power to use that knowledge, joined in a partnership to remake history!

Huebner sprang to his feet, wincing as his shoulder responded with a sharp stab of pain. "We can do it! I'm sure we can do it!" He took a quick drag on his cigaret and hastily ground it out in an ashtray. "I have the general outlines of the project sketched out already. It will take a few months to work out the immediate details, but we can start operations in the spring."

He froze in the middle of an excited gesture of his uninjured right arm, paralyzed by a sudden terrifying doubt. "Are you sure you'll go through with it?"

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"I said I would."

Huebner slowly sat down, staring dubiously at the Solar Executive. "I'd better tell you what it will involve."

"I'm eager to hear."

"These reforms that you've been pushing," Huebner explained slowly, "are just part of the normal pattern for a civilization at this stage; Augustus tried the same sort of thing. You can't save a culture by *ordering* it not to decline."

The Solar Executive raised his eyebrows. "What is necessary, then?"

"Actually," Huebner said, "*we* cannot rejuvenate the Western Culture. The only ones who can do that are the people of the solar system. All we can do is stimulate them and, to some extent, guide them in the right direction."

"I see — subsidize artists and writers — that sort of thing."

Huebner shook his head. "Augustus tried that, too. All he got was a typical 'golden age' literature — and Rome declined apace."

"Well, then. *What?*"

The anthropologist hesitated. "Differentiation — that's the key. Men create *new* things only when they're faced with a challenge; when, somehow, they're not adjusted to their environment. The prescription is to set up cultural gradients, to cultivate differences wherever we can find them. Uniformity is death to creativity."

The Solar Executive was frowning.

"But," Huebner went on, "all the main historical processes operating at present are tending to produce greater uniformity. Resonance transport — the ultimate in rapid transportation — is a great leveler. The fact that the solar system is now politically unified acts in the same direction; likewise the use of American English as the universal official language.

"So to stop the trend towards uniformity, we have to eliminate these factors — and many others. That means junking the RT system, granting political independence to every social unit that shows promise of being different from its neighbors . . ."

"Anarchy!" the executive snapped. "The twentieth century all over again, and worse!"

"Exactly," Huebner said. "Except that it will be premeditated, carefully-calculated anarchy, leading to a renaissance instead of another decline."

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"You can't be serious; I really expected something better than this from you."

"It's the only way."

The Solar Executive frowned at him in silence for a while; then a smile raised the corners of his mouth.

"You'd better check your calculations," he said. "I'm no cultural scientist, but even I can see why your plan would never work."

"Oh?" The anthropologist raised his eyebrows.

"To make that political independence mean anything at all, the power — the *ability* — of the central government to control the new units would have to be abolished. Am I right?"

Huebner nodded.

"And how long do you think it would be after I disbanded my army and junked my fleet before some other ambitious leader made his bid for rule of the solar system?"

"To wage a war of conquest on that scale takes a lot of equipment," Huebner said. "My plan requires that the majority of the American cybernetic factories be destroyed . . ."

Murphy flushed and came to his feet. His fist crashed down on the desk. "Never! This is insanity — not science!"

Huebner flinched before the executive's fury. "But don't you see, it's necessary."

The Solar Executive sat down and clamped his lips shut. He sighed deeply, then shook his head. "I'm sorry, Huebner, but so far as I can see your plan would simply smash civilization now, without waiting for your hypothetical decline. I can't let you do it. For the first time in centuries, we have a measure of peace and security — and that's too precious to throw away for any theory."

Huebner sank wearily back into his chair. He recognized that this was a case of two essentially incompatible viewpoints. It seemed almost as though he were doomed to failure by the deficiencies of those whose help he needed most desperately . . .

His knuckles abruptly went white as a great flood of realization swept through him. His eyes blurred; his breath was caught in his lungs. He thought:

Applequist — uncourageous slave mentality.

Bremer — a dilettante all too involved in his "good life."

Casari — greedy, self-interested individual.

Foudray — unprincipled youth.

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Murphy — realistic power-man.

What were these but types characteristic of the late declining period of a civilization?

Huebner glared blindly across the desk at the executive. There ought to be a general proof . . .

His eyes snapped into focus. "Quick! Do you have paper and pencil?"

He leaped to his feet, ignoring the pain of his injured shoulder, and grabbed the writing instrument with his right hand. Crouching over the desk, he began spilling equations onto the white virgin expanse of the pad.

"What on Earth . . . ?" Murphy began.

"Just a moment!" Huebner growled. He reached the bottom of the sheet, tore it off and started on the next. A minute later he wrote a final equation, slowly boxed it in with a heavy pencil line, and sank into his chair.

"So simple," he murmured. "A beautiful theorem . . ." He swallowed and wiped his eyes, then looked up at the dictator.

"What is it?" Murphy asked, frowning.

"The first equation," Huebner said slowly, "is the fundamental law of cultural dynamics, expressed as an eigenvalue problem in topological space. From it, by this transformation —" He indicated the pages of mathematical work. "— I reach *this.*" He laid an index finger on the last, boxed-in question. "It means — well, for one thing it means that I can't save Western Culture now because the people I would need to carry the job through have all been dead for a hundred years and more — all except me, and I can't do it alone. It means that the people in the world today are themselves subject to the world's present ills, and so are incapable of curing these ills. It means . . ."

He sighed. "Perhaps you remember those lines from Christopher Barrow:

"The tide of history is flooding full;
Against that flow can no man stand."

"That's what the equation means."

★

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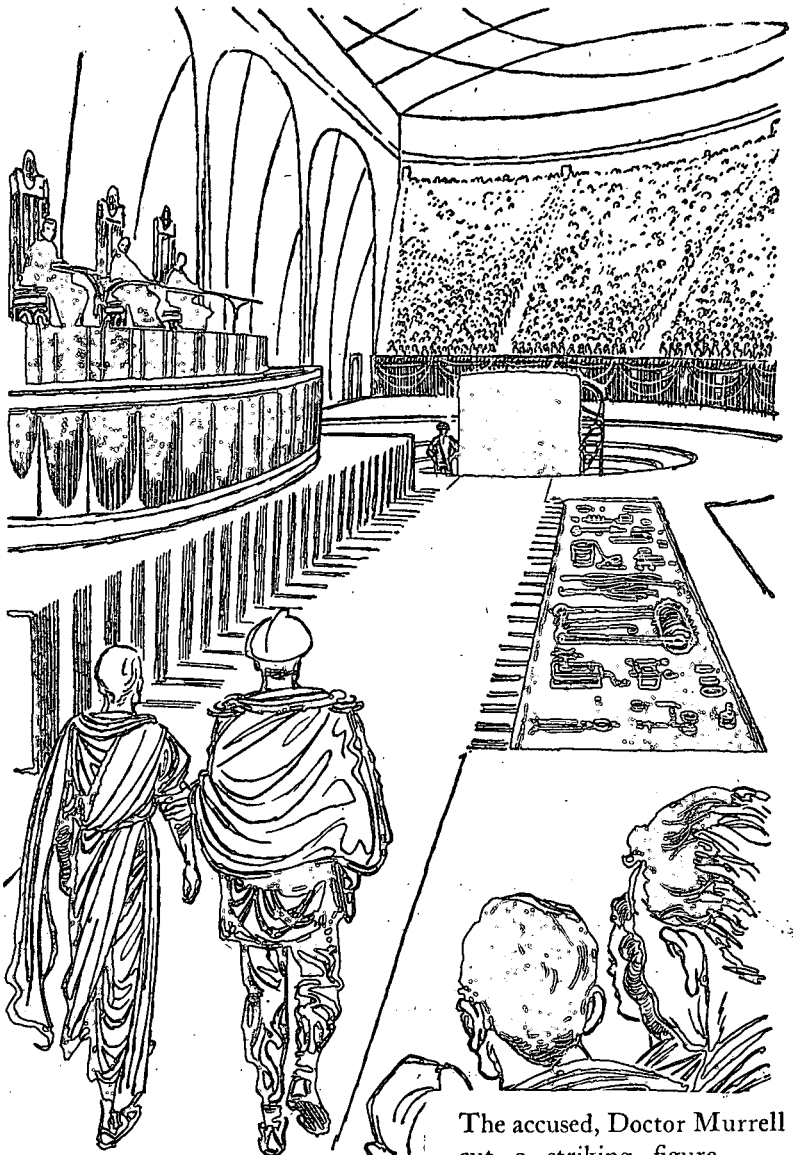

The accused, Doctor Murrell cut a striking figure. . . .

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NOVELET

The execution of one man would solve the problem—but that was exactly what must not be done!

TRIAL WITHOUT COMBAT

by Theodore L. Thomas

HIS FLESH peeled off in great patches. The fatty tissue around his stomach and hips turned back and dropped toward the floor, suspended momentarily on adhering fragments of skin. The sagging muscles on the underside of his arms went next. These were followed by the double chins and drooping cheeks. A good sized pile of synthetic flesh built up on the floor. And when he was done the tall, stooped, elderly figure of Doctor Felix Murrell stood revealed as the tall, straight, youthful figure of James Beal, CA-37978, of the Federal Bureau of Control.

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Beal disposed of the mess on the floor and dressed himself in the tight-fitting uniform of a Control Agent. He glanced around the room to make sure there were no signs of the transformation, and then made his way to the attic. After making certain that no late passers-by would notice, he opened a window and slipped out onto the steep roof. On all fours he climbed to a point near the chimney where the lift was moored. His hands groped over the surface until they found and opened the hatch.

He squeezed into the tiny machine and stretched out inside it. For over a minute he lay there counting the seconds; then he punched a key. With incredible speed the lift rose to rendezvous with its larger sister that orbited endlessly around the planet Bryan. Through scanning beams the lift sped, but no signal alarmed the good citizens below. The all-wave absorbents that clothed the lift's hull served their purpose well as Beal rode the lift to rendezvous.

As he neared the orbiting ship Beal felt his throat grow full and tight, and his heart began to race a little. He smiled to himself; the symptoms of an approaching meeting with one's beloved hadn't changed much in thirty centuries.

The lift nestled close to the mother ship, hatch to hatch. With singing heart Beal swung open both hatches and entered the main chamber in the ship. A man dressed in a Control Agent's uniform crossed to meet him, hand outstretched. "Well, Jim," said John Drew, with a smile. "How are you, man?"

"Fine, John, fine." said Beal, grasping the outstretched hand. "But," he continued, looking around the chamber, "Where's Neila?"

"Aha," said John, his smile turning to a broad grin, "Neila couldn't make the trip. She's — oh — indisposed."

"What?" said Beal. "John, what's wrong? Is she all right? Does she — ?"

"Hold on," laughed Drew, throwing up his hands. "She's fine. It's just that — well, let me be the first to congratulate you. You are going to be the father of an eight and a half pound baby boy."

BEAL'S LOOK of consternation gave way to a smile. "No fooling," he said. He crossed over and dropped into a chair and sat smiling foolishly at the tip of one of his boots. "No fooling," he said. "A boy, too."

"Yep," said Drew. "Just before I left they determined the sex of

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the fetus and what its optimum size should be at the end of term. The Chief sends his congratulations and Neila sent this note." He fished a small envelope from his tunic and handed it to Beal.

"Thanks," said Beal. He tore open the letter and read. It was just the sort of bubbling rambling note he had expected. He chuckled over it and put it away and looked up fatuously at his friend. He started to speak but caught himself, consternation spreading over his face. Drew put out a hand to him and asked, "What's the matter, Jim?"

"I just realized," said Beal, "that I may not be able to be with Neila when my son's born. I may not be finished here in time; I haven't yet completed my plans on how to straighten out this culture."

"What's the situation down below?" asked Drew. "You've had yourself established in the role of a chemist down there for a couple of years. Anything new or unusual to report?"

"No," said Beal. He got up and started pacing back and forth, pulling on his lower lip reflectively. "The problem down on Bryan is religion. The people eat, sleep, and work by ecclesiastical dogma. The head of the government and church is a fine old man known as the Senior. The trouble is he's getting a little old and his successor is a ruthless power-hungry man called the Bishard. The Bishard . . ."

"I know the situation," interrupted Drew. "I had the chance to listen to the recordings made at these meetings of yours in the past. Maybe the situation can be left alone. Are you sure it calls for the intervention of a Control Agent?"

"I am now," said Beal. "The heresy trials are getting worse. They're resorting to torture now. And most important of all, the Bishard and the Senior have now committed simony."

"Whomony?"

"Simony — the crime of selling ecclesiastical favor. A wealthy farmer bought his way out of the punishment that a poorer man would have received. When simony enters a religion, morals go out; so I've got to intervene."

"Uh, Jim," said Drew, hesitantly. "I've got some more news for you, not so good this time."

Beal spun around. "Neila's all right, isn't she?"

"Oh, yes; she's perfect. This is about your work here. You've got more troubles than you think."

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Beal took a step toward Drew and said, "What is it, John? What's happened?"

Drew waved a hand at a chair saying, "Sit down, Jim," and then he took one himself.

When they were settled Drew said, "Do you remember a Senator named Totry in the World Congress?"

Beal shook his head.

"Well, he's kicking up quite a fuss back on Earth these days. He's up for re-election; he needs a cause of some kind to get himself in the public eye — and we're it."

"What d'you mean?" asked Beal.

"He's making hay out of the Federal Bureau of Control. He says we Agents have too much power and operate under too much secrecy. He's out to drag all our operations into the open, and to condemn us for not doing our jobs correctly."

"Well, for heaven's sake," said Beal. "Hasn't the President shown him how we work? Doesn't he know that Agents only do what the whole Bureau agrees is best? Why, our record has been clean for 200 years."

"I know," said Drew. "But as I said, the Senator is only interested in getting reelected. He's particularly been yawping about our Execution policy — says we've misused it."

"Oh, that's ridiculous; no one has executed anyone unnecessarily."

"I know. I know. But the Bureau can't take a campaign to the people to show that the Senator is wrong. All we can do is wait for him to cite a specific instance and then show he's wrong about that. It'll all blow over before long; but in the meantime the Bureau has decided not to give the Senator the slightest excuse to call names. So no executions until further notice."

It was like a blow.

Beal sprang up. "What? No, John, they can't." He ran both hands through his short-cut red hair and started pacing again. "Why I have a list of people whose executions will immeasurably advance the civilization below. These people are rotten to the core; logical analyses shows that they will contaminate the entire culture. When the civilization finally achieves space travel, their effects will cause trouble. John, *they must be executed.*"

Drew shook his head. "Not now, Jim. Later okay, but you've got to do your work now without execution; Chief's orders."

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BEAL DROPPED into the chair disgustedly. "How do you like that? I undergo extensive surgery so they can build armament into me; I study from childhood; I train for many years. I pass the most difficult tests that can be devised in order to become an Agent. I work for ten years, correctly and successfully — and now I can't take advantage of my equipment or my training; I'm forced to do my work inefficiently. What a setup." He tugged reflectively at his lower lip.

"I know, Jim," said Drew gently. "It'll probably keep you from being with Neila when your boy is born too. That's why I asked if you were sure the situation here called for the intervention of an Agent. If you don't think so, you could go back to Earth now."

Beal looked at Drew and then at the tip of his boot. His forehead creased and his eyes narrowed. For a long moment he struggled with himself. Then he ran both hands through his hair, took a deep breath, straightening up, and grinned at Drew. "Tempting, isn't it? But I can't; these people are in trouble and I know it. I've got to stay and try and work something out. Neila can bring my son here to rendezvous once he's six months old anyhow, so I'll see him in a year even if I'm still stuck here. But let's talk and see if we can work out something to get me home on time."

They talked. Beal described the existing status of science to see if science could be used to steer the culture back on the proper path. Beal pointed out the strangeness of science on Bryan. Communications and related sciences were highly advanced, since those aided the government in keeping control of the people. Chemistry was about where it was early in the 19th century on Earth. But the life sciences such as biology, zoology, and anthropology were almost nonexistent since they might raise doubts as to The Almighty's creation of the Universe.

On and on the discussion went, but nothing could be settled. Several times during the talk, Beal had the uncomfortable feeling that the solution lay right in front of him, but he couldn't pull it out. And finally the time came when Beal had to return to his role of Doctor Felix Murrell. Drew suggested they check out his equipment.

"Good idea," said Beal. He got up and went over to a large closet-like cabinet one wall of which was covered with many hundreds of dials. He stripped off all his clothes and with a nod at Drew, stepped inside and slid the door shut.

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Drew approached the cabinet and threw the master switch. With a low hum the dials came to life. Thousands of tiny probing invisible beams laced the inside of the cabinet, thrusting deep into the bone and flesh of the man, seeking out the surgically-installed devices, testing circuts, recharging the minute A-batteries. A defective loud-speaker in a molar was discovered; the right teleporter needed adjustment; a shorted finger-nail projector needed attention. Body-shield controls were retuned, synthesizers were checked out. All the infinitesimal filaments making up the circuits between organic brain and inorganic devices were tested and put back in order. And when Beal stepped out of the cabinet and donned his uniform he was once again a fully tuned Agent — the deadliest destructive weapon that Earth's science could devise.

Deadly, but no longer lethal.

Yet he was a kind of weapon that was unknown before the creation of the Bureau of Control. He was something that was completely foreign to the ancient concept of what a weapon should be. He was the end-result of the merger between science and ethics; he was a weapon with a heart.

"All set now?" asked Beal when he was dressed.

"Yes," said Drew. "Everything checks out. You can split the planet in half if you want, or vaporize it for that matter."

"That's great." Beal said; "and all I'm allowed to do is talk to them."

BEAL LAUGHED bitterly. "Now let's see, John. The next rendezvous is four months from now. I don't have much hope that I'll be ready to go home to be with Neila, but who knows. Will you be available to meet me at rendezvous?"

Drew shook his head. "No, Jim. I'm on my way to the Lesser Clouds right now; got to check out a culture. I'll be gone at least a year. Anybody else you want? Except Neila, of course."

"Wise guy," muttered Beal, pulling at his lip. "No. Tell you what. If by any freak of chance I'm ready to go, I won't need anybody. If I'm not ready, talking with one person won't do any good at that time. So just have the Bureau send an Autoship with any suggestions they have after they've listened to the recordings of what you and I have said here; maybe they'll have an idea I can use if I haven't licked this thing by then."

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"All right," said Drew. "They'll have ideas, too; they always do. Once in a while they even have some good ones."

The two smiled at each other, thinking of the look on the faces of the Records personnel at the Bureau when they heard that last remark played back. The Bureau seldom issued orders to its Agents in the field as to how to solve a given problem; it realized that no one could know better than the Agent who had lived with the problem. So the Bureau merely made suggestions which could be followed or not, as the Agent in the field saw fit.

Except in cases of political necessity.

"Well," said Beal, holding out his hand, "nice to have seen you, John. Thank you for bringing me the good news and as for the bad, we'll have to put up with it. If you haven't picked up any more bad habits by the time you get back I'll let you meet my son."

"Thanks. Thanks a lot. Just try and keep me out. And Jim, I have the feeling you're pushing too hard to see an answer that might be right in front of you. Relax and let it come out."

Beal nodded. "I feel that way myself, now. I've had the funniest feeling that we've had the answer right in our laps tonight. You and I have been right on top of it; I know we have. But I can't pull it out; not yet. Well, I'll try and get it. So long, John." And he headed for the hatch.

"Good-bye, Jim."

A minute later the rendezvous split three ways. One part, an empty ship, returned to Earth carrying messages for the Federal Bureau of Control. A second part, a newly-assigned Agent, headed for the Magellanic Clouds to head off trouble there. And the third part, a lift with a perplexed Agent inside, dropped back to his task of rectifying a planet, within a four-month period.

TIME WENT fast for James Beal, too fast. In his role of Doctor Felix Murrell he played the part of an elderly chemist in a masterful way. Chemical inventions and discoveries flowed from his laboratories with healthy regularity — yet not so often as to draw more than passing attention from the Senior and other ecclesiastics at the head of the government.

Doctor Murrell's coworkers could all attest to the incredible amount of time and study that the good doctor put in on his work. They could not see that Murrell was busy with a completely different

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problem, and that the chemical inventions and discoveries were nothing more than occasional driblets from a vast reservoir of knowledge. Murrell would one day say to himself, "Hm. It's time for another invention. What shall I give them today?" And he'd pick something from the corner of his mind, write it up carefully, and release it.

A month passed. Regretfully, Beal put thoughts of execution aside and concentrated instead on the results that would follow a spectacular demonstration of power on his part. Possibly he could then order the government to make certain changes. After much thought, it became apparent that this wouldn't work. Beal could find no course that would lead to a good solution of the problem, but he wasted a month trying.

During the second month Beal explored the possibility of bringing an atheist underground cult to power under suitable controls. Exhaustive analysis showed it couldn't be done properly; the fanatical cult would lead the planet to ruin once they took control, even with Murrell among them to serve as a check. The changeover from absolute belief in The Almighty to absolute atheism would be too severe a shock for the culture to stand. Nor did there seem to be any way to tone down such a cult and still leave it effective as a carthartic; a cauterant iron has got to be hot.

As the time swiftly sped by, Beal became more and more tense. He knew he was trying too hard, but he couldn't force himself to relax. Beal was no more than a man — an unusual man to be sure, but simply a man. And lurking in the front of his mind was the annoying touch of the thought that the solution lay right in front of him. But the harder he tried to crystalize it, the more certainly it eluded him; and the more swiftly time went by.

During the third month Beal-Murrell took up the question of a scientific revolution. He analyzed the results of a general increase in scientific knowledge throughout the population. After exhaustive study he concluded that over a period of about three years he could change the attitude of the people from one of blind subservience to one of questioning doubt. The doubt could be nurtured into a force that would change the ways of the government; no government can stand against the collective will of a combined people. And then he was into the fourth month.

The first two weeks of the fourth month were the worst Beal

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had had on the planet. He saw that he would not be able to finish in time to be with his wife, and it was hard to swallow. More than anything he wanted to be at his wife's side when she bore him their first child — a boy at that. Beal felt a growing tension within him as the realization grew that he would not be Earthbound for some time yet. The disappointment was bitter; he almost considered throwing up his work and going home anyway, but neither he nor Neila would want that.

By the end of the second week in the fourth month Beal had himself in hand. It came on suddenly at the end of a frustrating day in his laboratory. For no explicable reason he found himself resigned to staying where he was for another few years. And with the resignation came peace of mind, the first he had known in three and a half months. No longer was his mind churning in fruitless turmoil, and his new frame of mind brought a new relaxation.

IT WAS LATE in the afternoon back in his house when he stretched out to take a nap — to get his first sound sleep in many many weeks. He lay there thinking of Neila, a rueful smile on his face. His thoughts ranged back to his talk with John Drew, and he chuckled. Good old John would see his son before he did, unless John hit as nasty a problem as he had here. This fool planet and its fixations. It would be all right if only the Senior hadn't allowed simony; that one transgression showed how the future would take shape. Fool farmer. He set up the conditions for simony, saying The Almighty doesn't exist and in front of people in a culture like this. Wealthy, too; that's probably what gave him the nerve to say it — he thought he could buy his way out. How right he was. And Beal began to drift into deep slumber. Just before sleep closed down his thoughts, words lazily drifted through his mind; simony, farmer showed it up; The Almighty exists; simony . . .

The solution lay here, somewhere . . .

Something crackled in his mind; something burst full blown from the subconscious to the conscious. It sat him bolt upright staring wide-eyed at the opposite wall. The solution was clear, complete in every detail. Nothing was missing. From beginning to end he saw what he had to do. So he set about doing it.

He sprang to his writing desk and swiftly wrote a letter in his own hand:

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To: Ecclesiastical Research Agency
Att'n: High Commissioner
Subject: Urea Synthesis
From: Felix Murrell, D.Ch.

I have recently completed an experiment which will shake our civilization.

As you know, chemistry is divided into two classes, organic and inorganic. We chemists can only synthesize compounds in the inorganic class. Only living things can synthesize organic compounds.

Yet I have just succeeded in synthesizing urea, one of the organic end products of the life processes in man. I have done it by subliming ammonium cyanate, an organic compound.

Thus I have now succeeded in closing the gap between animate and inanimate objects. Since I have synthesized urea, I foresee that other organic compounds will be snythesized too. There is no end to what man can do in the future. I submit that man will soon be able to synthesize life itself.

I think you will agree with me that the time has now come to re-evaluate man's position in the Universe.

Beal sealed the letter in an envelope and marked it urgent. He called up one of his lab assistants and had him deliver the letter personally to the Ecclesiastical Research Agency. Beal wasn't altogether certain that the letter would be read and passed up through the hierarchy that very night.

He needn't have worried; they came for him two hours later.

THAT FIRST NIGHT would have been very trying for elderly Doctor Felix Murrell if he had not been young Agent James Beal. As it was things were not very pleasant. No physical harm was done, but a great many people had a great many things to say to Doctor Murrell. They wanted to know what he meant by that remark about reevaluating man's position in the Universe. Murrell patiently explained over and over again that in synthesizing urea he had accomplished what had always been thought impossible. For the first time a human being had been able to synthesize what had formerly been produced only by a living kidney. Man at last had invaded the realm of living things. Man should soon be able to

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conquer that entire realm and synthesize life itself. Was anything logically wrong with that?

Yes, there was, he was told. In the first place it was perfectly clear that he had made a mistake. No one could synthesize urea; he had made a scientific blunder.

The Doctor then goodnaturedly explained that he had spent much of the time after sending the letter by calling many of his colleagues and explaining his urea synthesis to them in meticulous detail. Undoubtedly they had all tried it out thoroughly by this time; why not call up a dozen or so of them and ask them whether or not it is possible to synthesize urea?

After the placing of a few calls Doctor Murrell's questioners decided that the Commissioner should be awakened and told of what had happened. In swift succession, one official after another in ascending rank found his slumbers disturbed by discreet bangings on his door. It almost got up to the Senior himself, but the Bishard stopped it.

By the time the Bishard strode into Doctor Murrell's questioning chamber it was apparent that the Doctor's original views were undergoing some slight change. He was no longer so certain that the synthesis of an organic compound challenged the omniscience of The Almighty. By the time the Bishard had talked to him for two hours, the old man seemed definitely convinced that he had made a serious mistake; with that much accomplished, they let him get some needed sleep.

Early the next morning it came to the attention of the government that Doctor Murrell had gone a little beyond simply telling his colleagues how to synthesize urea; he had also pointed out to them that man had at last invaded The Almighty's domain. Although all of the scientists professed to pooh-pooh Murrell's statements about The Almighty, it was clear that they were deeply impressed with his chemical discovery. The government became slightly more perturbed when it realized that several of the scientists called by Murrell the preceding evening were on the government's blacklist of atheistic cult suspects.

By noon, every ecclesiastic from the Senior on down was in a state of high indignation at such a brazenly open challenge to the authority of The Almighty. At the same time, every scientist in the Chemical Society was in a state of high excitement over the accom-

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plishment of the impossible — the synthesis of an organic compound from inorganic starting materials.

The Bishard had another talk with Doctor Murrell to make certain that the Doctor would make no more rash statements. Much to the Bishard's surprise he found that the old Doctor had changed his mind again. Once again he insisted that man's position would have to be gone over. In fact, Murrell even went so far as to suggest to the Bishard some slight doubts about The Almighty's existence.

When that happened, the ecclesiastics rejoiced: Here was something they understood; here was heresy, and they knew how to handle heresy. It was one thing for a man to say that human beings were more important in the scheme of things than had been supposed; but it was something else again for a man to say, or even to suggest, that The Almighty didn't exist.

They got ready for trial.

FIRST CAME the softening-up process. Teams of questioners talked to Doctor Murrell in relays, nor were they adverse to laying on a heavy hand now and then. The entire questioning program was aimed at insuring that Doctor Murrell would freely confess heresy. Then at the trial, after listening to a moving discussion from the Senior himself, Murrell was to abjure heresy, and point out that the synthesis of urea was not inconsistent with a sincere belief in The Almighty.

Beal-Murrell sailed through the questioning period with flying colors. No one noticed that the blows that fell on him were completely absorbed by an energy field just under the skin. When Beal got hungry or thirsty, Murrell fainted. Food or water was promptly brought so that the old man would not die before serving his purpose. If Beal prolonged the session a day longer than necessary, he must not be too harshly blamed; there was no sense in spending an extra day in the lift waiting for rendezvous when he could spend it in a nice comfortable jail.

Murrell was finally reduced to the proper state, whereupon the trial was set for the following day. It was to be a trial of the first magnitude, tried by the supreme court itself. It wasn't every day that a topnotch scientist could serve so well the purpose of promoting the ecclesiastical government. Propaganda prepared the people all over the planet to see what happens to a man who saw fit to challenge

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governmental dogma; it was ordered that every teevee on the planet must be in working order.

The afternoon of the trial was rainy and chill, but the people in the capital city turned out in throngs anyway. The huge enclosed amphitheater in which the primary trials were held had to be completely filled with spectators; there was a rather heavy fine imposed on everyone in the city if it weren't. The amphitheater itself was shiny and bright.

The building had been designed and built for the sole purpose of holding trials. It was a most efficient courtroom; every inch of the vast structure had been planned to emphasize the authority of the government and de-emphasize the accused. The great dais in flaming red where sat the Senior flanked by the Bishard and the Canon in their black gowns dominated the entire interior. The prisoner's box rested in the lowermost level of the huge room. The box itself was ornately built of sufficient size to make even a large prisoner seem puny, yet it was designed with sufficient boldness so that the occupant never became an object of pity. And every prisoner who occupied that box wore striking robes carefully chosen to make all spectators realize that this was not a poor helpless fellow here, but one who had made a success of himself until he thought himself too big for the law. The microphones were cleverly placed so that the voices of the three judges boomed throughout the great building, while the voice of the accused could hardly be heard — except when he confessed, or otherwise proved the righteousness of the ecclesiastics; at that time his voice, too, would fill the great room.

The microphones, as well as the teevee and the lighting in the amphitheater, were all in the capable hands of a group of technicians trained in showmanship. This group saw to it that the great listening and watching public received the correct impression from the trial. Every man in the group was trained to control some activity. There was a volume-control man assigned to the microphone in front of each judge, and one to care for the prisoner's mike. There was even a man to judge how close the teevee should show the torture, should it become necessary to urge the prisoner to speak his mind. The entire presentation was produced and directed by men highly skilled in staging extravaganzas — men with all the resources of a technology that had carried communications to a surprisingly advanced state of development.

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PEOPLE BEGAN to pour into the amphitheater a full two hours before the show was scheduled to start. Hawkers selling soft drinks and edibles began circulating through the crowds. Slow music could be heard above the increasing rumble of voices.

A half an hour before curtain time the trumpeters and drummers took up their positions in a great overhanging box halfway up one wall. Fifteen minutes later, the Clerk and his cohorts entered. It was at that time that the teevee began beaming the trial over the entire planet.

The first episode was the entrance of the prisoner clothed in handsome robes of cardinal red and grey. Doctor Murrell was escorted to the prisoner's box by four black-robed Escorts.

Now Doctor Murrell was an elderly man; he had always been stooped and deliberate of motion. Yet on his march to the prisoner's box he walked like James Beal with his head held high and with a bounce in his step. The effect was astonishing; the audience could see that there was something very unusual about the prisoner, but they couldn't put their finger on what it was.

The route to the box threaded past the instruments of torture; this was supposed to have a sobering effect on the prisoner. Yet this springy, lightfooted old man gave the wheel of the rack a merry flip as he passed it by. And so by the time Doctor Murrell eagerly sprang up into the big prisoner's box, he had insured that one hundred and eighty million teevee viewers would stay glued to their screens. Obviously here was a most unusual prisoner.

A hushed, expectant silence fell as the moment came for the grand entrance of the three judges. Dressed in flowing black gowns edged in purple the three judges were lifted to their elevated seats on the dais by a slowly-rising platform. A thunderous crashing of drums and blaring of trumpets accompanied the majestic ascent. The assembled multitude stood with heads bent.

It was an awesome moment for all except the one hundred and eighty million teevee viewers — for while they could hear the trumpets and drums, and so know what was happening, they could not see the judges on the screen. Using a probe beam as he stood there, Beal cut certain teevee cameras from the circuit and cut in the camera focused on him. And so as the judges somberly moved to their places amidst inspiring pomp and circumstance, the teevee viewers were treated to a close-up view of Doctor Felix Murrell

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trying to swat an annoying fly that buzzed nearby. The horrified director responsible for the staging could see on the monitor screen what was being transmitted. He swiftly dispatched technicians to find the trouble, but his heart was no longer in his work.

THE MARSHAL cried *"Oyez, Oyez, Oyez,"* followed by an announcement that the mighty court was now in session to dispense The Almighty's justice. Everybody remained standing while the Senior delivered a moving 30 minute prayer for guidance. With that done, everybody sat down and the Clerk spent 15 minutes reading the charges — but all the charges could be condensed into one word: Heresy.

The Trial Seer took over to prove the case for the government. Doctor Murrell's letter was read aloud and made part of the record. Witness after witness paraded to the witness chair and told how Doctor Murrell had acted once he had discovered how to synthesize urea. It made a complete story that told how Doctor Murrell had challenged the authority of The Almighty. And when Doctor Murrell's confession was read into the record, there was no doubt in the mind of any spectators that this man Murrell was indeed a heretic. The government rested its case.

For a long moment the Senior gazed down at the accused, compassion written on his face. "Felix Murrell," he said, his marvelous voice ringing through the amphitheater. "Do you have anything to say in your defense?"

Doctor Murrell pulled himself away from the railing on which he had been lolling and said, "Yes, I have, Senior, and I thank you for giving me the opportunity to present it. I believe that you, in your profound wisdom, will see to it that true justice is done in this matter."

There was a stirring throughout the great chamber, a growing attentiveness, an awareness that there was a contest here. The one hundred and eighty million teevee viewers craned forward in their chairs just as did the spectators present.

Doctor Murrell said, "Your honor, I have been accused here of heresy. You define heresy as religious opinion opposed to the authorized doctrinal standards of your church, and tending to promote schism. Now I agree with your definition. But, Your Honor, where it can be shown that the doctrinal standards are completely erroneous,

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then I urge that the opposition of them is not heresy. False standards erect nothing to oppose; with them, there is no heresy."

A collective gasp came from the multitude. The Bishard leaned forward and rumbled down at the accused, "Are you saying that religion is false? You know what that means?" The Bishard waved a hand at the four Torturers. "To the rack with him."

The Torturers closed on the figure of Doctor Murrell. The Doctor raised a hand and said but one word, *"Wait."* But the word boomed forth in a roaring crash of sound that smashed out all the windows in the dais end of the amphitheater. The four Torturers were flung from their feet and stretched out senseless on the floor from the fury of that burst of sound. The three judges and all the nearby audience reeled from the shock, and clutched their near-bursting ears.

THE SILENCE that followed was almost as deafening as the concussion. Everyone stared at the broken windows in the control booth, thinking that something had happened to the amplifiers to cause the mighty sound.

Before anyone could realize that the sound emanated from him, Doctor Murrell began to speak. "Is this the teaching of your faith, Senior, to put an old man on a machine and pull his body apart? You can not justify a thing like that. I am ashamed to think that a man of your wisdom can stand by and see a human being so treated; you destroy the dignity of all men when you wrench out the bones of any one of them."

"Felix Murrell," said the Senior unsteadily. "By challenging The Almighty's existence you have put yourself outside the pale of the Faithful. We who believe in Him, who worship Him, must conform to the standards of the Faithful; you who do not, are something less than man."

Doctor Murrell nodded. "But Senior. What you say depends on the fact of The Almighty's existence. I am a scientist. I have recently succeeded in doing something that you thought could only be done with The Almighty's help. I have synthesized urea. Such a feat must cause a reappraisal of your values. You could never demonstrate The Almighty's existence before; you must be even more uncertain now. And here is why you can not make such a demonstration. The premises from which you deduce the existence of The Almighty must either

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be empirical or *a priori*. That is, you deduce it either from observation or from self-evident principles. If empirical, then any conclusions are merely probable and not certain. If *a priori*, then the conclusion does not convey any real information. So do you not agree that there is no possibility of demonstrating the existence of The Almighty?"

The Bishard started to speak, but his microphone was dead and his voice was lost in the vastness of the courtroom. The Senior replied.

"Felix Murrell, you speak as do all men of little faith. We need not *demonstrate* The Almighty's existence. We know He is with us. We feel Him; we believe in Him; He guides us in our thoughts and actions; He is everywhere. And for those who demand that His existence be proved, I can only extend my heart-wrung sorrow, for I must do what I can to eliminate such men from our midst less they do us harm."

Doctor Murrell leaped to the top of the ornate railing that surrounded the accused's box.

"You agree then that there is no possibility of demonstrating the existence of The Almighty. What you do not see, is that there is no possibility of proving that the existence of The Almighty is even probable. For if The Almighty's existence were even probable, then the proposition that He existed would be an empirical hypothesis and you could deduce from it and other empirical hypothesis certain experimental propositions which were not deducible from those other hypothesis alone. But this is not possible. So the proposition 'The Almighty exists' is not even probable; it is a meaningless proposition."

"Felix Murrell," said the Senior, "the nature of The Almighty is a mystery which transcends human understanding. The Almighty is not an object of understanding, but an object of faith. It is through faith that we know The Almighty."

"Senior," said Murrell. "When you say something transcends human understanding you say that that something is unintelligible, and what is unintelligible can not be significantly described. When you say The Almighty's existence must be taken on faith, you are saying that The Almighty is the object of purely mystical intuition. Therefore you cannot define The Almighty in terms that are intelligible to the reason. So if you cannot define The Almighty in

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intelligible terms, you are saying that it is impossible for a sentence both to be significant and to be about The Almighty."

A RUMBLE of voices from the spectators filled the room. Such reasoning had never before been heard by the people and they were not sure they liked it. Yet there was something appealing about those arguments, if only because they challenged the absolute authority of the government.

The Senior sensed the mixed feelings of the crowd and swiftly spoke to regain any lost ground. "In your own reasoning, Felix Murrell, the intuition of the Faithful reveal truths to them, even though they cannot explain to others what those truths are. You who do not possess this faculty have no ground for denying that it is cognitive faculty. It is a real and valid thing to us."

The crowd was silent again, listening carefully as Murrell answered. "I do not deny that a synthetic truth may be discovered by purely intuitive methods; but every proposition must be subject to the test of actual experience. I wait to hear what your propositions are so that I may subject them to the test of actual experience — to see whether they are verified or confuted by my empirical observations. But you not only produce nothing that can be verified, you don't produce intelligible propositions at all. Therefore I say that your intuition has not revealed to you any facts. It is no use your saying that you apprehend facts, but are unable to express them; for we all know that if you had any real information, you with your great gift of expression would be able to express it."

The Senior cut in rapidly, talking faster now. "It is completely possible for men to be acquainted with The Almighty just as they are immediately acquainted with any sense-content. There is no reason why one should believe a man when he says he sees a red patch of color, and not believe him when he says he sees The Almighty."

"Ah, Senior," said Murrell, "there you are right. If the man who says he sees The Almighty means he is experiencing a certain sense-content, then *he* may be right. But usually when a man says he sees The Almighty, he is saying not merely that he is experiencing a religious emotion, but also that there exists a transcendent being who is the object of his emotion, and this last is outside the sense-content. Anyway we can verify that statement that a man sees a

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red patch of color. There is no way to verify the statement that a man sees The Almighty."

There was no rumble of voices now. The spectators and teevee viewers strained forward in their seats. The Senior shook his head so vehemently that his long white hair flew in all directions. He was now earnestly trying to stem the tide. "You are forgetting something, Felix Murrell. The Almighty's existence is apparent to all who look about them. He can be seen in the sprouting of seeds and in the growing of plants; He can be seen in the beautiful complexity of the human body; He can be seen in the stars that parade in orderly arrangement across His heaven. He can be seen everywhere."

"Senior, you are saying that a certain sort of regularity in nature constitutes sufficient evidence for the existence of The Almighty. But if the proposition, 'The Almighty exists' entails no more than that certain phenomenon occur in certain sequences, then to assert The Almighty's existence is equivalent to asserting that there is the requisite regularity in nature. Is that all you mean when you say 'The Almighty exists'?"

"Of course not."

"Then you are adding something to your observations concerning the regularity of nature. Your observations are useless since you use them to establish a fact, and then stretch that fact way beyond the boundaries set by your observations. No, Senior. The existence of The Almighty is not even probable."

THE SENIOR stared wide-eyed and open-mouthed down at Doctor Murrell. The audience was in the same condition. Most of them did not completely understand what Doctor Murrell had said, but they saw he had argued the Senior to a standstill on the question of The Almighty's existence. Their senses reeled from the realization of what had happened. Most were deeply religious people who saw their basic beliefs shattered. There seemed nothing left for them.

The Senior sensed the havoc caused by the argument and he glanced helplessly about him. The cultists among the spectators were avidly drinking in the shattering of a religious fundamental, already planning on how to take over the government. The Senior had the same thought. He looked at the Doctor and asked, "Are you a member of that atheist cult that exists among our citizens?"

"No, Senior, I am not," said Doctor Murrell. "And let me point

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out something, for I see you missed the point. What I have said here is of no aid either to that group or to any atheist. An atheist holds that The Almighty does not exist, or that it is at least probable that The Almighty does not exist. But my position is that *all utterances* about The Almighty are meaningless. So if your assertion that The Almighty exists is meaningless, the atheists' assertion that The Almighty does not exist is just as meaningless. It is only a significant proposition that can be significantly contradicted. No, Senior, I am no atheist, nor does my position lend support to atheism."

Somehow this made the spectators feel better. They could understand that the taint of atheism was not a part of the strange lesson they were receiving.

"One more thing," said Doctor Murrell. "Let me point out that what I have said is of no comfort to the agnostics either. An agnostic holds that The Almighty's existence is a possibility in which there is no good reason either to believe or disbelieve. He does not deny that the question of The Almighty's existence is a genuine question. Since I have shown that these questions are meaningless, agnosticism too is completely ruled out."

WHILE DOCTOR MURRELL had been talking, the Bishard had several times tried to interrupt, but he had no means of communication. Furthermore since the volume of Doctor Murrell's voice had been gradually increasing despite the frantic efforts of the staging director to soften it, the Bishard found himself listening against his will. Doctor Murrell had been carefully watching the Bishard, waiting to catch him in a relaxed position, but so far he had been unable to.

By dint of vigorous gestures the Bishard finally caught the attention of a group of guards. His signals were clear: shoot Murrell.

Several guards leveled their weapons at Murrell and pressed the trigger. The darts flew straight at Murrell's body, and bounced harmlessly off. The crowd surged to its feet roaring in protest. Several other guards launched darts at Murrell with the same effect. The Senior's voice, fully amplified, cut across the uproar telling the guards to cease fire and the people to sit down. The Bishard sank helplessly back in his chair and in that instant unknown to anyone, soundlessly and without visible display, Murrell stunned him into insensibility.

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With order finally restored, the Senior again spoke to Murrell, "Doctor Murrell, what manner of man are you? The darts did not harm you. What have you done to us this day?"

"I have merely done that which needed doing, Senior."

"But you have destroyed to some extent our faith in The Almighty. Many of my people have now no place to rest their burden. When you take away The Almighty, you take away man's salvation as man. Why did you do this to us?"

Doctor Murrell nodded. "Senior, you have misunderstood what I have said. I have shown you and your people that there is no logical ground for antagonism between religion and natural science. There is absolutely *no relation* between the utterances of a religious man and the propositions of science; the one is on a different plane from the other. Since there is no relationship there is no antagonism. The two can live together in complete harmony, even in the same man. There is nothing illogical about a scientist believing in the existence of The Almighty; but if he does not, you can not force belief on him. So my purpose is merely to put your belief in The Almighty in its proper context. I think you can now see that there is no such crime as heresy. Since belief or disbelief in The Almighty is a personal matter, and is answerable to no man or government, no one can be called to account for his beliefs."

The chamber was silent as everyone digested what was said. And then Murrell spoke again more softly this time. "But there remains the crime of simony, Senior, and you are tainted with it."

The Senior looked startled and began to speak but Murrell cut out his microphone and continued himself.

"You allowed yourself to be convinced that a certain farmer should suffer lesser penalties if he paid sufficient money to the government. This was wrong, but your fault lies mostly in being weak and allowing the Bishard to convince you that what you did was right. The crime is his; he is the simonist. He is the one who took advantage of his ecclesiastical position to dispense favors. Since he is a ruthless, power-hungry and insincere man who is a menace to good men everywhere, I must now see to it that he is punished."

MILLIONS of eyes saw the figure of the Bishard lift from his chair at the dais and float rigidly to a position near the ceiling, well in front of the dais. Horror-stricken, not knowing that the Bishard

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was unconscious, the people saw flames appear at his feet and swiftly spread upwards to surround his entire body. It lasted only a few seconds, and then the Bishard swiftly floated back to his chair amidst deadly silence.

Beal's voice boomed forth. "I have purged him of simony; should it happen again the flames will consume him."

Doctor Murrell saw that the Senior was about to speak so he cut in the microphone. The Senior gasped hoarsely, "What are you?"

Soberly, Doctor Murrell replied, "I am a man, Senior — a man like yourself or like any other man on this lovely planet you call Bryan. I have come to show you that you need not fear science. The Almighty and your science can thrive together in complete harmony; you will see that this is so when you reorient your government into new channels." He paused momentarily and then went on. "And now, Senior, I must leave you. Is there anything you want to ask before I go?"

"Yes. How do we know you are only a man after all we have seen and heard here?"

"Because if I wanted to lie I would never tell you I was merely a man; I would tell you I was a prophet — or something like that. In any case, your people will understand hundreds of years from now when they listen to the recordings made here today. You and I will be long dead but the race will go on and it will understand. Is there anything else?"

"Yes. Do you believe in The Almighty?"

Beal chuckled within himself, certain now that he had judged the situation rightly. This man would start the culture back on the right path; an Agent could remove any remaining taint centuries hence. That Senator back on Earth could have no complaint now. And he answered quietly. "Yes, Senior. I believe in The Almighty."

Beal dropped lightly off the railing and swiftly walked over to the door and out into the gathering dusk.

And while the people of the planet Bryan quietly sat thinking about what they had seen and heard, high overhead a man with a singing heart entered a spaceship and started the oldest pilgrimage in the history of mankind. It was going to be a boy, by The Almighty — and eight and a half pounds at that.

★

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READIN' and WRITHIN'

BOOK REVIEWS
by Damon Knight

FALSE NIGHT, by Algis Budrys. Lion, 25c.

If the late attempts to form a guild of science-fiction writers had come to anything; and if, like the Mystery Writers of America, the guild had created a prize to be given each year for the best first novel; and if the judges had any sense — this book would be a cinch to win it.

Budrys is an improbably young man with an even more improbable respect for his craft. In this book he had taken the familiar theme of America after atomic war, and developed it neither as a Hollywood horror story nor as a Hollywood romance — but as history.

The narrative is kaleidoscopic: as the wheel turns, one character fades out to be replaced by another. The first of these is a lone wolf named Matt Garvin; the last is his great-grandson, Jeff. That thread — the Garvins — is one of the few that hold the book together, through about 60 years of elapsed time. But if there is a nearly-central character, it's the second-generation caesar, Ted Berendtsen.

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Here's the strength of the book: we see him as a contemporary might — clear and sharp, up in the foreground, at first, then more dimly as he rises in stature, hazier, as he towers, and then only the mists that close around a legend.

Nobody but history is the hero. For those who like optimism tempered with a little sanity, here it is — a broken world reeling, through many violent changes, back slowly to "normality."

The writing is uneven — parts of the first two chapters might have been ghost-written by Lester del Rey in a hurry — and so is the construction. Nevertheless, and although Lion's hasty cutting job muddles the plot and leaves loose ends dangling, the historic sweep of this novel is something rare and memorable in science fiction. Any logorrhetic amateur can write a 60-000-word short story, and many do; but this, in spite of its faults, is a novel.

JUDITH MERRIL'S new anthology, with the back-breaking title, BEYOND THE BARRIERS OF SPACE AND TIME (Random House, 294 pp., $2.95), contains 19 stories of which, by my reckoning, seven are A's, eight B's, and three abominations — a good average score, but poorish for Merril. One curious thing about this book is that its title and subtitling nowhere give you any hint that all 19 stories are, or pretend to be, about one kind of subject — the so-called psi powers, telepathy (seven stories), precognition (three), telekinesis (two), teleportation (one); creation of life (two), ghosts (one), rain-making (one) and time travel (one) — how did those get in?

Anyhow, the A's include John Collier's brilliant "Interpretation of a Dream"; Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s "Wolf Pack"; Katherine MacLean's "Defense Mechanism," of which more in a minute; and J. C. Furnas's wonderful "The Laocoön Complex" — about a man who involuntarily creates snakes in his bath. The propriety of including symbolic and satirical fantasies like this and the Miller story in a science-fiction collection is dubious, but it's hard to object when the stories are so good.

The B's are a rather sad lot, some very well written but all of them utterly predictable. Perhaps this is the trouble with psi as material for science fiction: there the marvel is, thought-reading or whatever, but after you have asked "How does it work?" and get no answer, there isn't much more to say about it.

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The C's are very sad indeed, beginning with an uninspired, trite and poorly written I-talked-with-dogs story which Merril spent a lot of time tracking down, God knows why ("No One Believed Me," by Will Thompson), and descending through ineptness by Agatha Christie and Bill Brown to a story called "Crazy Joey," by Mark Clifton and Alex Apostolides. "Crazy Joey" is a telepathy story, as if that were just what the collection lacked; it is miserably written, and in substance it adds nothing at all to Katherine MacLean's "Defense Mechanism" — the latter, in spite of one deliberate flaw, one of the most elegant and compact pieces of reasoning the field has produced.

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, FOURTH SERIES (Doubleday 250 pp., $3.50 — why?) is the first of these annual collections to be edited by Boucher alone. McComas will be missed, but *F&SF*, by now, is a venerable institution that may well (though heaven forbid it should have to) survive even greater shocks.

My favorites of the 15 stories here collected are Alfred Bester's "Fondly Fahrenheit"; Richard Matheson's "The Test"; and Robert Sheckley's "The Accountant." Those I like least are Poul Anderson's foolish "The Immortal Game"; Daniel F. Galouye's pulpy "Sanctuary"; and Manly Wade Wellman's southern-fried "The Little Black Train."

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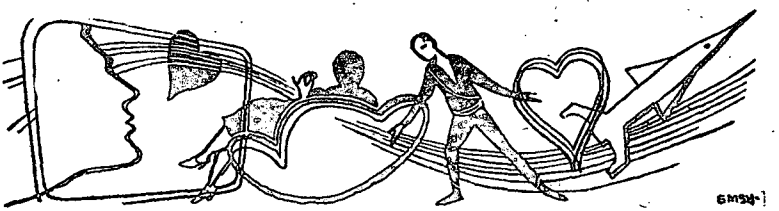

After all, hadn't all the primitives in the past been building up to this?

THIS THING CALLED LOVE

by Carol Emshwiller

TODAY I stopped loving Allen. It happened real suddenly. I came down to breakfast, which Mike had dialed for me on the Meel-O-Mat. (He's rather nice that way.) I sat down beside Mike and all of a sudden I thought to myself, *Allen stinks.* Just like that, and it was over. So I said it out loud, "Allen stinks."

Mike gave this sigh of relief. "So it's over at last," he said; and I said, "It sure is."

Then he got a very serious look on his face. "Janie," he said, "I've been waiting for this to happen; I've been wanting to talk to you about us."

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I had watched Allen's every show for years. . . .

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"Mmmm?" I hate people to talk about serious things when I'm eating. How can you enjoy your food when you have to concentrate on something else? The Meel-O-Mat had just served an omelette and hot rolls, so I didn't listen till I'd finished all I wanted. Then I said, "Will you please repeat. I was eating."

That's when he told me he was in love with me. Me! I'm glad I didn't listen till I'd finished my breakfast because it made me laugh so I wouldn't have been able to eat half so much. You see, we've been married five years, and, after all, we're human beings. There's no doubt about *that*. I admit I'm pretty much on the plump side and my hair couldn't be any straighter. And, believe me, it's not hard to see that Mike is human too. He's almost bald, and his nose — well, you'd never see one like that on TV. Not in a million years.

So a bald-headed, hook-nosed, very human, human being says he's in love with a straight haired fatty. Now I ask you, does that make sense? Why we didn't even think of loving each other when we got married.

Mike didn't think it was a joke, though. He's been getting pretty unrealistic lately, if you ask me.

"Will you stop laughing and listen just once till I finish?" he said. "I've been thinking a lot about this and it's important even if it *isn't* being broadcast over TV. Listen, I do love you. I don't know how I can convince you, but I do."

He was looking at me with those big, earnest eyes of his. So I said to myself, *If you want to play it serious, I can play it serious as well as any*. But I sure saved up a lot of laughs for later, and I kept thinking, *Wait till Betty hears this*.

Anyway, I stopped laughing, and he went on with the "I love you" business for a while; then he said that the way people love nowadays is unnatural and that our whole life is unnatural. He even said that people, *real* people, were beautiful just like the TV stars. Better, he said. As I said, he was getting very unrealistic.

"I can't convince you by talking," he said, "but maybe I can show you, if you can just drag yourself away from that TV set for a while."

"Not me," I said. "Do you think I like not being in love? I'm going to find myself another TV star just as soon as I can."

"Look," Mike said, "just give me a couple of days."

"No sir!"

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"Listen, I'll tell you what it's all about. You heard about the pioneer rocket ships on the TV news didn't you?"

I HAD HEARD about them all right, and I could see right away what he was driving at. He'd got some crazy idea he wanted to go with them, off pioneering, and the rules were, nobody could go without their wife. And not only that, you had to sign a statement you'd have children. No just one, which was the legal limit on earth, but three or four. You can see how primitive life would be. And I don't think they were taking any TV robots either; there wasn't going to be room for anything but ordinary human beings.

"Janie," Mike said, "I want you to see the rockets as I've seen them, and what the people are doing; and I want you to see some of the history shows at the museum. You might understand more. Please. Just give me a couple of days."

"You want me to take two whole days out of my life to go trapsing off to dead exhibits! Why those museum shows don't even have background music. Don't think I'm a complete ignoramus. I saw one once."

"Please."

"Besides, I haven't been away from the TV set that long since I was a year and a half. Mother always said I was a precocious listener. Really. Only a year and a half and I was listening regularly. Of course I couldn't understand all . . ."

"*Janie.* If you have any feelings about our marriage at all, you could grant me a couple of days."

"Oh, all right; don't make a fuss, for heaven's sake. I'll let you have a day or so."

So, before I knew it, I found myself in the museum.

Of course there was nobody there but us. Oh, there were two old men who could read, but everybody knows anyone that reads is a crackpot, so I don't count them.

Anyway, we played some shows and it was all old stuff as far as I could see. I hadn't *seen* any of them before, but things get spread around — by the grapevine, I guess. I mean, we all know that before people were civilized they used actual human beings as actors on their TV shows. And we know what sort of human beings they were, too.

Mike is still pretty naive about things even when it comes to his-

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tory, which, I must say, he loves. I asked him right then. I said, "Did they use *ordinary, everyday* human beings as actors?"

Of course I knew they hadn't, and Mike had to admit they picked the ones that looked the most like robots, and made them up to seem even more so. Sometimes they used false teeth and false hair and stuff to cover skin blemishes. If they couldn't *be* robots, they sure tried hard to be *like* them. Some of them came awfully close, too; they were almost pretty.

Finally I told Mike this was all old stuff, and asked him why, in heavens name, was he making me look at it?

"I thought you might get a new perspective on things if you saw a sequence of how they developed," he said. "At least I hoped."

"Well I can see even better than I could before," I told him, "how people were trying to get just what we have right now."

Mike looked kind of shocked; then he said, "Come on. Let's go see the ships." And that was the end of the museum trip.

THE ROCKETS were pretty interesting. I was surprised. Of course I've seen things like this on TV lots of times — better, in fact — but seeing the real thing had a different feel. I could almost understand why Mike wanted to go. Of course he was letting his emotions carry him away, but it *was* exciting — the ships so big, and all that bustle around them.

The first one was going to leave the very next day even though it didn't have its full quota. These days it's pretty hard to get people to volunteer for this sort of thing, which isn't surprising.

Mike was pretty excited, too. "Look at those men," he said. "We could be like that. It doesn't take long to harden up and to slim down; we could look a lot more like the actors than we do, if we tried."

"They may have better-looking figures than most people," I said, "but they're still a long way from the robots."

"I'm damn glad they are; they're human beings and that means a lot."

I was shocked. I've never heard that kind of talk before. I'm glad there was nobody near us to hear it.

"You've already got such odd ideas, what will happen if you go off with these people?" I said. "I don't see how we can go. I mean, if you had *ordinary* ideas there wouldn't be so much danger, and

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maybe we *could* go then. But as it is, you'll be completely uncivilized out there in the wilds, just where it's most necessary to keep our values. What about art and beauty, too? No TV, no actors. Are they just going down the drain? No; you can't do it — you're already too far gone."

"But Janie, this isn't the only way to be civilized, or the only art."

"It is to me, and that museum trip proved it. We're right at the point where people long ago wanted to be. No, you can't go; *I* won't go — so you can't go either."

"Look, you promised me one more day. Please don't decide till then."

"Well, if you can change my mind — which I doubt — you're welcome to try."

So, that was the end of day number one, and hardly a pleasant day, at that. Not being in love was making me awfully jumpy, too; I wasn't sure I could hold out a whole day more.

THE NEXT DAY when I came down, Mike had punched the Meel-O-Mat buttons again and ordered me a nice breakfast, as usual, but he wasn't there. He must have gotten up early and gone for a walk again. It's a bad habit which I've told him and told him I dislike — especially when the neighbors can see, and everything. But he does it occasionally, anyway; I guess it's some kind of a phobia.

I finished breakfast and then I was stuck. I had promised not to look at the TV today, but what was there to do?

Finally I decided to call my neighbor, Betty, and I told her the whole story about Mike and the rocket ships and history and everything. We had a good laugh over it, and I felt even more that I was right not to go. I mean . . . well . . . what other decision is there?

Anyway, the phone call didn't really take so very long, and afterwards I tried to think of someone else to call. But everyone I know, except Betty, would be mad as anything if I interrupted a TV show. So I sat around a few minutes wondering, and then I went into the TV room. After all, Mike had gone for a walk, and *I* don't like *that*, so how could he kick about this? Besides, I said, a day or so, when I promised — not two days exactly.

I'm certainly awfully glad I did turn the set on right then, otherwise

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I might have missed Jerry. He looked handsomer than any robot I'd ever seen, and especially so when I thought of how generations and generations of human beings had been striving all through the ages for just such artistic perfection. He had a smooth and perfect face, and such silky hair, and large, blue eyes. Bluer than real eyes could ever be. His shirt was open to the waist and his chest was shiny and hairless underneath.

I was in love again, and it was wonderful.

The program was over by the time Mike got home, but Jerry would be on again tonight at eight. I had already signed up for Jerry's fan club, too.

MIKE DIDN'T say anything when he came in. I guess anybody could see I was in love again, and Mike knew there was no sense in talking. He was right; there wasn't.

He went up to our room, to mope a while, I guess, and then he came downstairs and went out again. I saw him from the TV room window. I supposed he was going for another walk, but he didn't come back for lunch and not for supper either. Of course this didn't worry me too much. I was caught up in the programs for the day and hardly had time to think about anything but Jerry now and then.

I began to wonder a little after Jerry's night program was over and I had ordered a case of Jay's Jet action soap. (Jerry said it was best to get it by the case.) I guessed Mike was really put out about not getting to go on one of those ships. But, after all, it had been out of the question all along, as far as I was concerned — and that meant for him, too.

At nine I watched a news program of the launching of the first pioneer rocket ship. The quota, surprisingly, was almost filled. Much closer than expected, it seems.

At nine thirty, Jack — Betty's husband — knocked on the door. As soon as I opened it I could see he was mad. "Do you know what they've done," he shouted.

"Who?" I asked.

"Your husband and my wife; they've left on the rocket ship together."

"Why that's illegal; they're not even married."

"Well, they've done it, and they've left us."

Then I got pretty mad too, and we shouted at each other for

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about a half an hour. And then Jack asked if it was close to ten yet; it was, so he left in a hurry. He's in love with Grace Glenn; she's always on at ten.

I calmed down pretty soon, what with some nice music on TV. After all, I thought, I had Jerry. And then I got to thinking about Jack, upstairs. He's not so bad, a nice steady type without any fancy ideas. I wouldn't want to stay unmarried very long. I wonder . . .

"Maturity" In Science Fiction - 2

(*Continued from page* 5)

I suspect that "gadget" science fiction is what most people think of when the term is mentioned, particularly people outside the ranks of enthusiasts. It is possible, as some have claimed, that more stories of this type have been presented under the science fiction label than any of the other types, and perhaps more than all of the other types added together; you can also call it "invention" science fiction. It is based strictly on the physical sciences and deals primarily with some sort of discovery, invention, technique, process, etc., and the effects that this "gadget" has upon the people in the story — as well as upon society in general, in the most carefully and skillfully worked out examples. The "gadget" is primary to the plot, motivations, and events; it may present the problem, it may solve the problem, but without it the story does not exist. Regardless of the author's skill in presenting his characters, the "gadget" is the main thing, and because the center of attraction and interest here must necessarily be exterior to human beings, it seems to me that this type of story, by its very nature, cannot rise above the level of popular fiction. (In stories dealing with ESP, the psi functions, these are treated as gadgets.)

Next, we have "adventure" science fiction, into which classification I would put all stories dealing with *places* where, as yet, no human being has been — or "space" science fiction, if you will. Here the center of interest is reaction to and adjustment to phenomena, including sentient life on other worlds, etc., and speculation on the basis of inferences drawn from observations of what lies beyond

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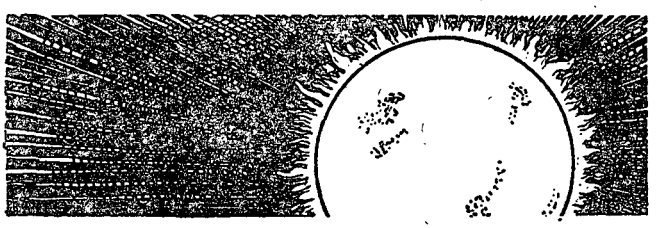
Earth's atmosphere. *Since we do not yet know* what changes, if any, the fact of being off this world, will make in any given human being's character, and the way his personality will express such changes, science fiction writers can merely present variations on observed human behavior under various conditions of stress and strain here on Earth. It makes for exciting speculation, but the center of interest must lie in the imagined locale and phenomenon, without which there would be no story. In other words, if the story — so far as the characters' behavior is concerned — could have been told without reference to an alien environment, then it has no extra literary value for having been placed on Mars, etc. But since it *has* been placed on Mars, etc., then the implications of being on Mars must color everything else in the tale, if we are going to have sufficient verisimilitude for a first class story. This, I think, will freeze the interplanetary story to the limitations of popular fiction so long as manned rockets do not yet exist, and no one has landed on the moon.

There remains "social," or "humanistic," "philosophical," "psychological," etc. science fiction, wherein the hub of the story is inquiry into one or more of the many problems of human behavior and relations, with which most educated people are more or less familiar. Stories dealing with the "ideal society" or its obverse; the nature of "life," "liberty," and the "pursuit of happiness"; questions of "love," "beauty," "truth," "ethics," "free will"; definitions of "sanity"; satire, etc., may or may not include unheard-of inventions and phenomenon in the background, may or may not also be tales of adventure and romance, providing if such are included, they do not take the spotlight away from the human theme and the human questions.

It is in this realm I would say that it seems to be possible for a work of science fiction to appear which could qualify as literature.

—*The Editor.*



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by Eando Binder

IRON MAN

It was a new type of obsession for a psychotherapist—a man who was firmly convinced that he was a robot!

CHARLEY BECKER dropped his tools and announced, "I'm going to get oiled."

Hank Norton looked up in surprise at his co-worker in the sonox department. Becker was small and slight, with thin hair and the makings of a bald spot. He was the quiet kind who worked week in and week out with patient efficiency. He was inconspicuous, and sometimes you hardly knew he was there. It was hard not to smile at his thin voice that always came out like a woman's highpitched treble.

That was partly what surprised Hank Norton. Becker's voice had

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come out in a deep manly tone, for once. More shocking were the words. As far as anybody knew, Charley Becker had never taken a drop in his life; two beers would have been a rip-roaring orgy for him.

"Did *you* say that, Charley?" Norton queried, just to be sure.

"Yes, I'm going to get oiled," Becker boomed again.

Norton nodded in understanding then, noting his strained face. "Shaky nerves, Charley? I've seen it happen before. Working year after year on these monotonous robot sonox units sure can get a guy at times."

He shot a spark into the speech center of the robot he was working on. The robot came to life and gave out an eerie, human-like groan. "Almost sounds human," Norton said. "Plenty weird, coming from a bunch of junk. Never thought it would get you, though, Charley. It's only an hour to quitting time; keep working and forget it."

But Becker was already turning. "I'm going to get oiled," he repeated, and stalked over to Pete Osgood in the grease pit.

"Oil me," he said.

Osgood wasn't in a good humor. "Lay off, Charley; that one has whiskers on it."

"I am in need of oiling," said Becker, standing there stiffly. He raised his left arm slowly, rigidly. "Observe, sir. This shoulder joint sticks; oil it, please."

Osgood got sore. "Now listen here, Charley. For the last time, don't try to make a fool of me."

"But I need oiling," said Becker. And that is your duty."

Osgood snatched up an oil can. "You asked for it, Charley," he said with a wicked grin. He squirted oil lavishly over Becker's left shoulder. It soaked into his shirt and dripped off his elbow.

"You're all oiled up now, X-88," Osgood roared, suddenly amused, waiting for Becker's dismay.

"Thank you, sir," said Becker, swinging his arm freely. "The shoulder joint is now working properly."

He turned on his heel precisely and strode heavily to the door. Pete Osgood dropped the oil-can, as Hank Norton came up.

"Goshsakes," Osgood choked. "He wasn't kidding."

Charles Becker marched out of the building and down the street along which sprawled the *Winton Robot Works.*

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LORA BECKER was rearranging furniture, as she did regularly, hating uniformity. Which accounted for the fact that she was a bluehead this week, and was using cerulean lipstick whereas last week her hair and lips had blazed emerald green. Underneath the cosmetic customs of the day, she was a blonde — not a ravishing blonde, but you'd call her attractively pert and petite, with built-in cuteness.

Right now, she wanted the furniture in a double aisle effect, which she hoped Charley wouldn't mind. But then, he never objected to anything she did. He was meek and mild, always. And sweet. She loved him. Why? Because she loved him.

She tugged at the heavy 55-inch TV-console in the corner, hardly able to budge it.

"Allow me, madam," said a strong voice behind her.

She whirled, startled. "Charley! I didn't hear you come in, and you're home early; anything wrong, honey?"

"Nothing is wrong," said Becker, lifting the console off the floor, holding it suspended.

"Charley, your back," she cried in horror; "you'll sprain it. Let it down."

"Where does madam wish it placed?" Becker still held it as if it weighed a pound, instead of a hundred plus.

"Over there, against the violet wall. But, honey, you can't carry it way over there —"

She stopped and watched, her lips open. Becker was already across the room and swung it easily into position. He turned without panting.

Lora blinked her rosy lashes, in fascination.

"Charley, it's . . . well, before you used to puff and groan over lifting one small chair. Where in the world did you get all this he-man strength? Honest, I'm floored, honey. Well, say something, Charley. Don't just stand there."

"Do not call me Charley," said Charley Becker. "Nor other human endearments. They are out of place, madam; my factory designation is X-88."

After a blank moment, Lora twinkled happily.

"You got a raise, dear. That must be it. And they let you off early to tell me and celebrate. No wonder you're in such a good humor, playing jokes. Come and kiss me now, my great big he-man hero."

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Becker ignored her arm-spread invitation. "Robots never become familiar with their masters or mistresses, in the human sense," he said in flat tones.

"A robot, eh?" teased Lora, rushing and hugging him. "Come on, squeeze me. Crush my ribs in your mighty steel embrace, tall, silver, and handsomely polished."

Becker let his arms hang, not responding. "That is exactly what would happen, madam; I would crush your ribs. What are your orders now? X-88 is your servant."

Lora laughed till the tears rolled.

"Honest, Charley, I never knew you had a sense of humor like that. It must have been a whopping raise and some big promotion. Won't tell yet? All right, have your fun. Meantime, what would you like for supper? Anything you want. What's your mouth watering for?"

"Oil," said Becker. "Grade 20, robo-refined, of atomic radiation 60 roentgens. It is the standard fuel for robots."

"Oil it is," said Lora gravely. "Lemon flavor? Or chilled, with whipped cream on top?"

Chuckling, she whirled to the kitchen, and rummaged in the Dinner Freeze for one of his favorites.

When they sat down at the table, five minutes later, Lora pointed at the bowl. "Your oil, X-88."

Becker raised it to his lips and took a swallow. He spat it out violently, but without emotion. "That is not oil, madam. That is jellied consomme."

Lora stared in dismay at the spattered smears on the wall. A trace of annoyance came into her voice. "Dear, isn't that carrying it a little too far? It's your favorite, it always has been, and I thought you'd be pleased."

"Any human food products, taken internally, can cause a short circuit and severe damage, madam. Now my neck joint is stiff from that organic matter; it must be oiled."

Lora sighed, and decided to smile it all the way through, as her husband stalked to the tool closet, took out a can of oil, and squirted it around his neck, swiveling his head back and forth.

But Lora lost her smile when Charley unscrewed the top, tilted the can, and poured the rest down his throat.

Lora screamed.

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LORA SAID, her face heavily overlaid with rose powder to hide the sleepless lines, "Yes, Doctor; my husband thinks he's a robot. He refused to come into bed last night. He just stood in the corner, like robots do for the night. Unmoving. All night." She continued after a moment. "In the morning he still stood there. He hadn't moved a muscle. Doctor, I —"

"Easy, Mrs. Becker," soothed the psychiatrist.

Dr. John Grady wore the pleasant face, quieting smile, and firm assurance of his profession. He was tidy in dress, relaxed in manner; he was objective and unemotional. He was sharp and penetrative in thought, able to leap like a bloodhound through the mazes of the human mind. His cases were all clinically interesting, but one must never pity the patient or his loved ones. Theoretically.

But Grady pitied Lora Becker. Theory be damned; she had a problem — a real stinker of a problem.

He turned professional again. "Your husband worked in a robot assembly factory? How long?"

"Nine years; he was in charge of tuning up their speech units."

"His job required him to speak to them and get their answers? Teach them? Train them to understand human language?"

Lora nodded. "He often told me how queer it was, even though he did it a thousand times. How queer to suddenly find a machine talking back to you, with an almost human mind. He got to calling them 'he' and 'him' instead of 'it.'"

Dr. Grady studied that.

"Slow progression of personality projection. Giving them human status, in his mind. But still, harmless unless — tell me, Mrs. Becker. Did he ever worry about it? That is, did it bother him in some specific way, dealing with these humanlike mechanical men?"

Lora thought. "Yes, now that you mention it. I'd always kid him out of it, but sometimes he'd come home all nervous, telling me he had just murdered a robot."

"Murdered?"

"Well, some turned out defective; their mental units did not respond the right way. Charley called them 'idiots.' Or robot 'morons.' And useless then, of course. So he had to send an electric spark through the brain unit, burning it out. Whenever he did that, he'd sleep badly that night, just as if he had killed a man."

The psychiatrist processed that through his mental mill for a

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silent minute. "Anxiety neurosis," he said, tentatively. "Leading to retreat into robot identity himself. It was the only way, perhaps, that he could absolve himself of those 'killings.' The one way to ease his guilt complex. Charles Becker 'murdered' them; but not X-88, the robot. That freed him of guilt."

That was for her benefit, the simplification; they always felt better, hearing it put into clear-cut terms. They never understood the real diagnosis, bent and fractured emotions piled high like a pyramid, up which the investigator had to climb step by step, hoping to reach the apex.

There was the obvious fact that Becker was a puny man. No doubt all his adult life he had had to fend off the barbs. Hey, shorty. Every inch a mouse, ha-ha. My *dear,* no other woman would look at him once. No thanks, said the cannibal, I just had shrimp for breakfast.

Oh, it was understandable enough.

Yearnings created. Unfulfilled wish dreams. To be a big strong man. Or stronger than any man. Like a robot.

Also, as routinely recorded first by the nurse, they had no children — with his sterility at fault, not hers, as medically checked. Lack of male virility; again a steady hammering at his shrinking ego, day upon day.

Lora Becker was a good wife, no doubt of it. Loved him in spite of all. But in unguarded moments, little slips must have leaked past her lips. Oh, poor darling, don't strain yourself . . . that awful pawing Ed Ashley, big and strong sure but I'll take my little sweet boy anytime . . . really, dear, lots of men can't be fathers and the world is so full of brats already.

And then the robots, where he worked, giving human-like groans as they "died" under his hands. Weakness and unmanliness and robot brains stamped out. Guilt piled on guilt; the pyramid growing till it crushed him, cruelly.

All Becker's problems were solved in one stroke. Robots were not weaklings; robots never had children; and robots were at last rid of that human killer, Charles Becker.

That was his escape, free at last from all torment. That was the tangle to unravel, in its broad outline. Dr. Grady cut off his mental sketching. He had to be ready for the question they always asked. Always.

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LORA WAS asking it, twisting her hands. "How serious is it, Doctor? Can he be —?"

So often they left the word out.

"Cured?" furnished Grady, softly, carefully. How many years had it taken him to eliminate all betraying inflections? "Now don't worry, Mrs. Becker; we acknowledge few hopeless cases here in 1972. Wait in the outer office, please, while I talk to him."

After Lora sat down in the waiting room and pretended to read a magazine with blurred eyes, Dr. Grady called to the small man standing like a statue in the corner, unobtrusively. But with the self-effacement of a trained robot, not of a meek man.

"This way please, Mr. Becker."

Becker did not turn his head, nor even blink.

Grady nodded to himself. "This way please, X-88."

Becker came to life and obediently followed him into the private office. The door shut soundlessly.

"Lie on that couch," the doctor waved. "This will take an hour."

"I'll stand, sir; robots do not tire."

Grady allowed no trace of surprise or annoyance on his face, fixed in neutral pleasantness from long practice. "Yes, of course. As you choose. Your name?"

"X-88, sir. Robot home servant out of the Winton Works."

"The name Charles Becker. What does it mean to you?"

"Nothing, sir. However, the name Becker itself does; I am the robot servant of Mrs. Lora Becker."

"Ah, but if Lora Becker is married, she must have a husband. Where is he?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Is Mrs. Becker widowed or divorced?"

"No. That is, I don't know."

"Yes, you do know," said Grady, but not sharply. He said it casually, genially. "You answered correctly at first, before changing it. This shows that somehow, you yourself are fully aware that Mrs. Becker has a living husband, from whom she is not separated. Is he away on a trip?"

"No."

"Again you know the answer. Then where is he? It is an interesting question, isn't it? Why would not her devoted husband show up all last evening and through the night?"

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"Because he — I —" Becker stopped, turning blank. "A robot is unaware of human relationships and doings; I cannot answer."

"Yes, you can answer," said the psychiatrist patiently. His tone was unaccusing, friendly, persuasive. "You almost gave me the answer a moment ago. You are not a robot called X-88, are you? Think once; you are a man, a human being of flesh and blood, called Charles Becker. Isn't that right?"

Logic should bring him back, now.

Grady waited, hopefully. Had he broken through? Surely the preposterous fixation could not stand up in the face of pure logic. The robot masquerade must have weak chinks in its armor.

But the hard, set face did not change. "I am robot X-88," Becker said, in a nasal voice that exactly imitated the hundreds of robots he had activated into speech for nine years.

Dr. Grady sighed inwardly, conceding defeat for the time being. He had at least expected Becker to emerge a moment or two, bewildered, before retreating again into his robot fantasy. It was comparatively rare for such an utter change of personality to stick like glue this long, in its primary stages.

GRADY PICKED up a book on his desk, casually. Toying with it, he rose and approached the man who thought he was a robot. "Robots feel no pain, of course," he said.

"That is right, sir; robots feel no pain."

Grady suddenly jabbed the book at Becker, using its corners to dig into his ribs. Grady was not gentle about it, and he was a strong man.

Reaction, zero.

"As you said, sir, robots feel no pain."

Grady turned away. There must be a purple bruise there, under his clothes. No man could take sudden pain without at least a gasp; Becker hadn't flinched in the slightest.

The doctor's trained thoughts followed up the pattern. Complete transference of personality. Complete belief that he was a robot, an iron man, with an iron skin holding no pain nerves. Fakirs walking through live coals, or lying on beds of sharp nails. Ordinary people too, under fear and stress, carrying bad wounds without feeling them till later. Psychosomatic nerve block. It was of that near-incredible mental astigmatism to physical hurt.

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Becker not only thought himself a robot. He *was* a robot. In all ways.

In all ways?

"A robot has three times the strength of a big man," stated Dr. Grady. "A robot could, for instance, raise one corner of my safe, there. Go and do it, X-88."

Becker stalked over without a word. He even imitated the slow, heavy tread of a three-hundred pound robot to perfection, with his soaking-wet 125; it was oddly humorous, in a quite humorless way.

Grady held his breath as Becker stooped for a hand-hold underneath the steel safe, standing on short legs. The human robot strained and lifted one corner off the floor, with his pipestem arms and frail back. Three powerful men could hardly have done the same.

Becker let it back silently, without a thump, as a well-trained, high-powered robot would. He turned and straightened, without triumph. Robots did not gloat.

"Very good," said Grady evenly. "As a robot, you could also jump out my window, fall ten floors, and land without harm, taking up the shock by trigger reflexes of your knee joints."

"That is right, sir."

Grady's eyes narrowed just a bit. The fear of death; the will to live — a man's strongest instinctive drive. Would Becker break down under that threat, and emerge from hiding in the shell of X-88?

"Go and jump out the window, X-88," said Grady, in direct order. Surely that would call his "bluff."

"Which window?" asked Becker, turning and walking toward the three that overlooked the street.

"The middle one," said Grady.

Becker was already halfway there, his step firm. He covered the rest of the distance, raised the window.

"Order rescinded," said Grady. "I have decided the jump is hardly necessary." Grady kept smiling; he had a hard-worn smile that could cover any inward shudder. "Return home now, X-88, with Mrs. Becker. Obey her implicitly in all things."

Dr. Grady toned up his smile for Lora as he patted her arm. "It went well but it will take time," he said softly. "Meanwhile, treat him as if he were your robot servant. Avoid calling him Charles or any endearment. Call him X-88. Give him household tasks to do, but

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nothing more. This is to erase all antagonism and resistance in him. Bring him back tomorrow."

Back in his office, before the next patient came in, Dr. Grady cast aside his smile. It was a unique case, the first he had heard of in psychiatric records, since robots had only been on the market for some twelve years. One thing struck him forcefully.

It would take time, he had told Lora Becker. It was one of the fundamental tenets of psychiatry to never hurry. To take your time. Never force things. There was no time limit in curing mental aberrations. No deadline to meet.

But with Charles Becker, there was a deadline.

Robots did not eat or drink human foods.

DR. GRADY was ready the next day. He had cancelled all his morning patients. They could wait; they ate and lived. He had concentrated all his thoughts on the new problem, and had his campaign worked out.

It had to break through fast. Fast. Charles Becker had been without food and drink for 48 hours already.

Grady wore his pleasant smile as Becker strode in, thumping his feet on the floor in slow measured steps.

"Charles Becker," said Grady, "is a killer of robots. At the factory from which you came, X-88, he was a worker. He often murdered defective robots; is that right?"

Becker's eyes flicked. "Yes, that is right."

Grady was pleased. X-88 now admitted knowing Charles Becker, where before he had denied it. A slight opening.

Grady wormed further in. "But robots do not have human status. Under the law, they are nothing but clever machines. Is a man, a human being, a murderer if he smashes a car, or a television set, or an electronic brain unit?"

"No," said Becker.

"A robot," said Grady, "is no more than a finer and more ingenious combination of the mechanical locomotion of a car, the perception of a sensitive TV-unit, and a compact electron brain. Therefore, Charles Becker was not committing murder when he destroyed robots; he only got rid of useless machinery. He would be foolish to have any sort of guilt complex over it, would he not?"

"I do not understand such human emotions."

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Grady thought. *Defense mechanism.* As a robot, Becker did not need to follow the reasoning. Still intact. A mental barrier it was hopeless to attack. It was the root and foundation of his complex, built up solidly through nine long years.

Grady shifted the attack to concrete things. "Do you feel weak, X-88?"

"No."

"But you've had no food for two days."

"Robots do not eat human food. However, four ounces of fuel must be given a robot each day, to keep him at peak performance; Mrs. Becker did not give me any."

No, thought Grady, *because I phoned her and said not to.* He had pressed the desk button and his nurse came in, wheeling a tea-table loaded with hot steaming foods, directly before Becker. His nose could not fail to drink in the tempting aromas. His human stomach could not fail to hunger for what lay within reach.

Becker did not turn or move for five silent minutes.

Grady gave up waiting. "Eat," he commanded.

"Sorry, but I must refuse," said Becker. "Human food is harmful to us; robots have built-in guards against obeying any commands harmful to them."

Grady smiled. Damnable. By the same token, he could not get any knock-out drug down Becker's throat, to render him unconscious, and then force-feed him. Nor could ten men help him overpower Becker by sheer weight of numbers, for force feeding. Becker would clamp his jaws shut, defying their fingers to open them; even if they managed to stuff food down his throat, he would automatically spit it out.

Force-feeding was out. Feeding of any kind was out until X-88 gave up the ghost and left.

The doctor signalled and the nurse wheeled the table out. He crossed that off his list on the desk. Then he brought a can of fuel-oil to Becker. It was ordinary oil, but looked quite like the poisonous radiated robot fuel. But it had another secret ingredient in it. Ipecac.

"Your fuel, X-88."

Becker drank it down. Robots drank their fuel like humans, down a fuel-pipe gullet to the fuel distribution system below. It was as mechanically efficient as any other way.

Becker stood a while, then retched violently over the rug.

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As the nurse cleaned it up, Grady waited for Becker to explain it. If he was still a robot.

BECKER WAS still a robot. "That oil fuel was contaminated, sir; unfit for robot motors. But all late models are fitted with selective ejectors halfway to the fuel distributor system. Any unsuitable fuel is automatically regurgitated."

"Of course," smiled Grady. "Stupid of me to forget."

He drew a line through item two and shifted to item three.

"Punch a hole in this sheet metal with your fist," he said, pointing to a square-yard of steel 1/32 inch thick, held firmly in a stand and clamps.

Robots could smash a fist through gauges up to 1/32 inch; beyond that, they would shatter their intricate knuckle mechanisms.

Something had to work, Grady told himself. Something had to be insurmountable to the human limitations of Becker. Then he would begin to shed his fixation of X-88 the robot.

Hard steel, impervious to the human fist.

There was a loud noise as Becker's fist smashed through the steel plate. He withdrew the hand, without wincing. Knuckles unbruised, Grady noted. No blood. No broken bones sticking out under torn flesh.

Grady's pencil scraped across that item. Roughly, it was the well-known "maniacal" strength. Iron will, especially if psychotic, giving iron hardness momentarily to human bones and flesh. Hardly supernatural — merely the realm where supreme mental effort commanded all glandular and muscular processes to one powerful acme.

Mind over matter. A trite simplification but the nutshell of it, basically. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Charles Becker and X-88.

Grady swung his thoughts to the next item.

BUT SUDDENLY, Lora came running in. Wild-eyed, she darted glances from the doctor to Becker, as if sensing failure. "I can't stand it any longer," she shrieked. Sobbing, she lifted the bottle to her lips. "Good-bye, dearest."

"Stop!" yelled Dr. Grady. "Don't drink that deadly poison." He stumbled over the rug clumsily, and was too late to stop her. She gulped the bottle down, swayed on her feet, fell. Grady caught her limp form.

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"Your wife — dead," he said to Becker. "The woman you love."

"Charles Becker's wife," corrected X-88. "A robot does not love."

"Wait in the outer office again," said Grady, putting Lora on her feet. She cast a backward glance, choked, and closed the door behind her.

Grady crossed that off. Emotion, love. X-88 would have none of it.

"Strip yourself," ordered Grady. "Of all clothing."

Becker obeyed. It was no surprise to X-88 that he wore human clothing. Most robot servants did in human homes, to hide their metallic shine and make them less alien. Most people wanted it that way.

Becker stood nude.

"Robots are sexless," stated Grady.

"Yes."

"But humans have sex organs," said the doctor simply, holding a large mirror in the right position. "How can X-88 have the same?"

"I have no sex organ, sir; I am a robot."

Grady tilted the mirror. "Your face. What do you see?"

"I see shiny metal reflected," said Becker. "The usual TV eye-units, false nose, mouth for fuel intake. No human beard or hair."

Grady put the mirror away. Complete visual illusion. Looking at his own body. Becker's eyes refused to see what could not exist on a robot. Sex organ, head of hair, fingernails, navel — none of those existed for X-88.

But Grady did not tell Becker to dress. He still stood nude. The emotion of love he had denied. There was a stronger instinctive drive; he buzzed twice in signal.

Lora came in, not the nurse. She stared at her unclothed husband without surprise.

"Ready to go through with it?" the doctor asked gently.

Lora blushed but nodded.

"I'm glad you agreed," said Grady. "If you hadn't, I'm afraid I would have been forced to insist. I'll leave the room. Take all the time you need. There is a closet for your clothes. When you wish me back, press the desk button." He touched her hand. "Remember, try your best. It's important. And it can't wait for another time and place."

Lora watched the door close on the doctor. Then, glancing at the nude figure of her husband with another blush, she began undressing.

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She stood before him all the while, deliberately. His eyes did not focus on her at all. Did not seem to see the soft white thighs revealed, the womanly curves.

Lora blushed no more. It was like undressing in complete personal privacy among inanimate furniture. But she went on desperately and finally stood before him, dropping the last bit of clothing coyly. Charles Becker had always responded to her charms — always.

WHEN DR. GRADY answered the buzzer and strode in, Lora shook her head in anguish, fixing the last button. "He ignored me. Like a — a robot."

She fled to the waiting room, leaving a trail of tears.

Grady drew a line again on his list. The sex drive was completely absent in robots, including X-88.

He had already checked with Lora on other bodily functions, and knew it was a blind alley. Robots did not eliminate waste products; neither did X-88. But that was comparatively simple — cessation of digestion, and metabolism slowed down to the minimum required for mere basic existence. Intestines, kidneys, all internal organs under rigid control.

One more item left.

But this was the clincher, and Grady had expected it to come down to this finally; at least, the preceding had perhaps opened the way. Placed some tiny doubt in the mind of X-88. Enough to burst the flood-gates over one final inconsistency in his hallucination.

Then X-88 would leave. Charles Becker would return, and in time for a hearty meal before he collapsed from hunger. Lack of food had no meaning to X-88, but could be carried to an extreme of slow starvation for submerged Becker.

This final item had to get Becker out of his iron trap, thought Grady, and the play of words did not amuse him.

Grady opened his desk drawer, but first, in preparation, he said, "Remember this, X-88. Charles Becker, who worked at the robot assembly plant, is not a killer. Not a murderer. No guilt hangs over him. For nine years, only doing his job and burning out the brain-units of defective robots, he let that false thought loom in his mind. Without reason. He is innocent. He can return and face the world without stigma or disgrace. Charles Becker, wherever he is hiding now, has no slightest reason not to return. Is that clear?"

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"I understand nothing of what you say," said the man robot.

No, thought Grady, *but your ears heard the words and your mind recorded them. Your human mind. You will remember.*

Grady stepped forward. He had a sharp knife in his hand.

"Robots do not bleed," he said. "They have no blood; you have no blood. Is that right, X-88?"

"I have no blood," agreed Becker, unflinching.

"I will plunge this knife into you. There will be no blood, of course."

"No blood."

That was established. The stage was ready. Blood dripping. X-88 would see it, feel it, unable to explain it away. Unable to explain his soft vulnerability. X-88 would leave; Charles Becker would come back, bleeding.

It had greater significance, too. Something which allowed Grady to pin his confidence on it strongly. Man was born of woman, in blood. In that flow of blood, Charles Becker would be born again. A strong fundamental memory association, vibrating in every fiber of every man since life began.

Grady slowly raised the knife. He poised for a moment. He plunged the knife at Becker, who stood stolid, waiting. It must be a deep wound, short of fatal, letting blood gush. An artery. No half measures; easy enough to doctor him for that later.

Grady used the full power of his muscular arm. Grady pulled back the knife after the third hard thrust at three different parts of the body. Grady stared at the knife.

Grady slowly walked to his desk. He crossed off the last item. He dropped the pencil. He thought ahead to the report he would make to the psychiatric people, jolting them. Jolting all their pleasant smiles from their calm faces.

How skin and flesh could turn to iron. Biologic iron, as strong as steel. Stronger than steel. He dropped the knife with its dulled point and twisted blade. Shiny. Unbloody. Intravenous injection of food? The last road was blocked.

Dr. Grady held onto his smile, for Lora. But he wondered how he could tell her.

Not that she would be a widow soon; that she had been a widow for three days already.

★

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This show was supposed to make history—and it did!

CORNZAN, THE MIGHTY

By L. Sprague de Camp

FRANKLIN HAHN sat in the cafeteria of Station WCNQ with Cassia MacDermott. She had just turned down his thirty-fifth proposal of marriage, and then Dr. Ilya Sorokin had come over to eat his hamburger with them, putting a stop to the argument.

Hahn was a tall, gangly, eyeglassed man whose early baldness made him look older than his thirty-three years. He was the script-writer for the television-moumpicture serial "Cornzan the Mighty." He owed this position to the ability, when shut in a room with a typewriter, to grind out unlimited amounts of magazine radio, and television copy — like a spider spinning silk.

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Shooting was to start that afternoon on the first instalment of the second series of Cornzan's adventures. This instalment would make TV-MP history. Not only was it designed for alethochromatic, three-dimensional, wide-screen, high-fidelity, dual-modulation broadcasting, but also it represented the first commercial use of the consiline-hypnosis on the actors. This treatment made them believe, while they were acting their parts, that they actually were the characters whom they portrayed. And the hundred-foot snake that played a role in the action was a real hundred-foot serpent, grown from an ordinary twenty-foot Brazilian anaconda with hormones by

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Ilya Sorokin, discoverer of consiline and proprietor of the Sorokin Laboratories. The show was being touted as a "Bimillennial festival" (that is, a celebration of the year 2000) by the network to which WCNQ belonged.

Cassia, tall and very blonde and gorgeous, asked Sorokin: "How's your cute little snake?"

"Sasha is all right, thank you," said Sorokin, a small man with a narrow face under a spreading brush of gray hair. (Hahn thought that "cute" was not the *mot juste* to describe the gigantic serpent.) "I fed him those three drugged sheep this morning so he is nice and torpid; it took all the floor-men on the lot to drag him into place."

"Hey, Sorokin!" said a loud voice. Mortimer Knight, program manager for moumpictures, strode over from the executives' lunch-room, his thinning gray hair plastered against his scalp. "Know what you done? Swindled us, that's what! Your goddam snake isn't any hundred feet long as called for in the contract!"

"Hello, Ego," said Hahn, "which ulcer is it this time?"

"No?" said Sorokin.

"No!" Ignoring Hahn, Knight smote the table. "I and Lynd just measured the thing with a steel tape, and it's only ninety-nine feet, four and a half inches!"

"Perhaps you measured Sasha along the inner curve?"

"Hell no! We measured the outside curve, which gives you the benefit of any doubt. Well?"

Sorokin peered about with a cornered-rabbit expression and sighted the assistant manager for moumpictures. "Oh, Mr. Jaffe!"

Jaffe waddled over, sweating. Knight repeated his tale.

"Well, Doctor?" said Jaffe.

Sorokin shrugged. "Perhaps the hormones did not balance. I warned Mr. Knight, but he insisted —"

"Damn right!" howled Mortimer Knight. "WCNQ delivers the ultimate in entertainment realism! You said you could deliver. They told me you were a genius! After this, I had better be the only genius around here . . ."

"Mort," said Jaffe, "since shooting starts today, let's not break our schedule for seven inches of snake."

"Seven and a half," said Knight.

"Well, I hate snakes, and I think the less anaconda the better.

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Send a memo to my desk if you think it's that important, and I'll deal with Dr. Sorokin."

Jaffe walked elephantinely off. Franklin Hahn looked at his back with mixed feelings. Ben Jaffe was nice to everybody, but when it came to protecting anybody in the lower echelons from the tyranny of his turbulent subordinate, he was always somewhere else. Hence, under Mortimer Knight the directors, assistant directors, actors, script-writers, news-editors, floor-men, prop-men, artists, and other employees writhed in well-paid slavery. The Moumpicture Division commanded almost as imposing a plant, and numerous a personnel, as had one of the motion-picture studios of Hollywood — back in the days when Hollywood made motion-pictures to be shown in theaters which people had to pay to enter.

Knight glanced at his wrist-watch. "What's the matter with you people? Indoctrination's in three minutes, and you dawdle over your coffee. Come on!" He glared around and sighted Remington Dallas, who played Cornzan. "Remington!" he screamed. "Indoctrination!"

Knight strode towards the exit, the others straggling after. Cassia said softly: "Frank, I don't see how you get away with being so fresh to Mr. Knight."

"Oh, Mort considers insolence a sign of genius, because that's how *he* is. The way to get along with him is to insult him before he does you."

IN THE dispensary, Franklin Hahn found that Eisenhower Lynd, the director of "Cornzan the Mighty," had preceded them. The nurse handed Sorokin the yellow folders containing the health-records of Cassia MacDermott and Remington Dallas. The great biochemist studied these, frowning through his glasses. Lynd, a tall, big-nosed, sandy-haired yes-man, asked if the others had heard the new limerick about the bearded old barkeep named Tucker. Receiving a negative, he recited the verse. Everybody laughed except Sorokin, who solemnly took the squirt-pistol from the nurse and said: "Pull up your shorts, please."

Cassia and Dallas hiked up their shorts until each displayed the outer side of a thigh four inches below the hip-joint. Sorokin checked the pistol to make sure that the capsule containing the charge of consiline was in place; then he aimed at Remington Dallas' thigh and pulled the trigger. There was a sharp little sound. Dallas winced

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and rubbed a tiny red spot on his leg. The slug of liquid consiline had been squirted at high velocity through his skin and would take effect in due course.

Sorokin re-loaded the squirt-pistol and repeated the process with Cassia MacDermott. He said: You have one hour to get dressed and made up. I shall see you back here then for final indoctrination."

"Okay," said Remington Dallas. He and his leading lady went out, followed by the others. Dallas was an ex-boxer with some experience as a Shakespearean bit-player — a hugely muscular young man with a mild amiability that covered an almost complete lack of a mind of his own. The blankness of his docile personality made him an ideal subject for acting under consiline-indoctrination. Having no individuality, he could be given hypnotic suggestions to play almost any kind of part and would do so with complete conviction, unmarred by personal idiocyncrasies.

Hahn followed Knight and Lynd through the long corridors of the main WCNQ building to the stages.

"Not too much noise, please," said Sorokin. "Sasha gets nervous; he is conditioned against eating people —"

"How'd you do that?" asked Hahn. "Feed him a few tough ones like the Ego here?"

"No; by electric shocks. But a snake has so little learning-capacity that you have very little leeway. A big shock or fright might cancel his training."

The cavernous north end of the building devoted eight stages to "Cornzan." There was the patch of jungle to be used in today's sequence, a piece of desert, the main square of the city of Djelibin, and so on. The party picked its way over cables and around cameras and lights to the jungle set. This, besides its synthetic rain-forest flora, included the small ruined temple or shrine of the Elder God Yak, whence Cornzan was to rescue Lululu. Around the temple, nose almost touching tail, Sasha lay in a circle. Hahn's eye, sweeping along the huge scaly olive-gray barrel with big purplish-brown splotches, rested on the three small but significant bulges that told of the fate of the drugged sheep.

Sorokin stepped near to Sasha's five-foot head to peer at his pet. The snake lay still.

"You need not be afraid," said Sorokin. "Sasha is too big to be

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efficient. If he chases you, just run away. He can only move at a slow walk."

BACK in the dispensary, Franklin Hahn smoked a cigaret as he waited. Eisenhower Lynd clamped a pair of earphones on his head and started the recorder. After listening for a few minutes he said: "D'you tell 'em not to notice the cameras and crewmen?"

"Yep. Further along," replied Hahn. Indoctrinees had to be given, by suggestion, a selective blindness towards incongruous elements in the scene. Too much strain on the illusion under which they would act might send them into a psychotic collapse.

Knight stormed back into the dispensary, followed by Ilya Sorokin, Cassia MacDermott, and Remington Dallas. Cassia wore a kind of abbreviated mardi-gras costume, glittering with spangles; Dallas was dressed in sandals and a super-fancy loincloth. A harness of straps supported a long, heavy sword and a big dagger. Both actors wore the woozy, peering expressions that marked the first stage of the consiline-trance.

Under Sorokin's instructions, the actors lay down on the couches. Eisenhower Lynd had run the spool of his record back to the beginning. Sorokin put earphones on the heads of his two subjects and started both recorders. The recorders made a faint shrill cheeping sound because they were being run at quadruple speed.

But the data got through, nonetheless.

The tapes told the actors that they were Cornzan and Lululu respectively and summed up the story to that point. The epic of Cornzan was laid on the imaginary planet Anthon, revolving around the sun at the same distance as the earth, but on the opposite side. Hahn's original name for the planet had been Antichthon, Greek for "counter-earth," and used in this sense in some fiction and scientific speculations. However, Knight had decided that three syllables were too many. "Antic" would not do; "Tichthon" sounded like a trade-name for an alarm-clock; so "Anthon" was chosen.

Cornzan was the son of an earthly scientist, John Carson, and his wife. Their spaceship had crashed on the first expedition to Anthon, killing everybody but the infant Cornzan, who spent his boyhood among the tree-men of Ea; swinging from branch to branch with them had developed his colossal thews. Reaching invincible manhood, he became a mercenary soldier under the wicked King Djurk of

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Djelibin. He had, however, quarreled with King Djurk and fallen in love with Djurk's daughter Lululu.

After escapes and adventures with which the previous series of broadcasts had dealt, Cornzan was about to rescue Princess Lululu from the Temple of Yak, where the heartless Djurk had left her tied up, in the hope that Cornzan — in trying to rescue her — would be killed by the giant snake.

Franklin Hahn lounged in his chair and stared at the recumbent Cassia, indulging in fantasies in which she was his mate and the couch was that in his own little apartment. Moritmer Knight leaned across in front of him to say to Eisenhower Lynd: "Hey, I got a limerick that caps yours:

"An actor named Remington Dallas
Played Macbeth with such fervor and malice
That, addressing the witches,
He ruptured his breeches
And exposed his utter incompetence."

Lynd dutifully laughed, but Sorokin snarled: "Shut up!"

"Nobody shuts me up in my own studio!" retorted Knight.

"But you will ruin the indoctrination, you conceited fool!"

"Why, you —" Knight's words became obscene. Both men glared and snarled at each other in stage-whispers.

"Hey, Ego, save it till later!" said Hahn. Lynd added his whispers to the effort to pacify Knight.

"Okay," muttered Knight. "But as soon as the series is over, this guy goes out of WCNQ on his can. He swindles us on that snake —"

"You think I work with you again?" hissed Sorokin. "Do I look crazy? Wait till my new drug is going and I will put all you sons out of business."

"Huh? What drug?" said Knight.

"Somnone-beta. With that I indoctrinate, not the actors, but the customer. One of Hahn's tapes takes place of all the apparatus in this building."

"You mean," said Franklin Hahn, "you give the customer a shot, and run off a tape, and then at the time he's told to he goes into a trance and dreams the show?"

"Is right. No actors, no sets, no engineering, no nothing. Customer makes up his own story according to the directions on the tape. He

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can be participant or onlooker; the entertainment is much more vivid than anything you can get watching a stage or screen."

"You slimy snake," began Knight.

"Snakes are not slimy. And it will be only what you deserve, you paranoid megalomaniac!"

"Now who's shouting?" said Knight. "*You* shut up!"

Cassia MacDermott's recorder ran out of tape and stopped with a click. Remington Dallas' did likewise. Sorokin touched a finger to his lips and removed the earphones.

Cassia and Dallas — or Princess Lululu and Cornzan the Mighty, as they now believed themselves to be — rose and shambled out. The others followed.

LULULU went directly to the jungle set. Dallas threw himself down on a cot near the stage and closed his eyes. Near the stage stood two other actors in costume: Robert Gelbman as King Djurk in goatee and drooping Fu-Manchu mustache, and William Harris as his henchman, Boger.

The stout Jaffe puffed up. He glanced at Sasha, shut his eyes, shuddered, and resolutely turned his back on the ophidian prodigy.

"Quiet, everybody," said Knight. "We're ready to roll. Take it away, Eisenhower."

Over the body of Sasha, the floor-men had placed an oversized stepladder, like a stile over a fence. Robert Gelbman (King Djurk) and William Harris (Bogar) climbed up one side of the ladder and down the other, so that they were inside the circle of Sasha's body.

Meanwhile another pair of floor-men tied up Lululu with a rope, being careful neither to tie her too tightly, nor to smudge her make-up. When they had finished, one of them snapped a springhook on the end of a rope to the heroine's harness. Two others, pulling on the free end of the hoisting-rope (which went over a pulley in the cavernous overhead) hoisted Lululu into the air. Another guided her over Sasha's body. Gelbman and Harris caught her as she swung across, lowered her to the ground, and unsnapped the hoisting-line, which was whisked away.

"Roll it," said Eisenhower Lynd.

The cameras went into action as Djurk and Bogar carried the struggling princess up the steps of the temple. Although technical improvements had made television-sequences shot from moum-pic-

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tures fully as convincing as live television broadcasts, so that this method was now used for all fictional presentations, the limitations of the consiline-treatment made it necessary to photograph such sequences in one continuous filming — as with live broadcasts — without the retakes of normal moumpic practice. If a scene were flubbed it could be remade, but that meant re-drugging and reindoctrinating the actors the next day.

Djurk and Bogar placed the volubly protesting Lululu in a sitting position in the entrance to the shrine.

"Ha, ha!" laughed King Djurk. "Now you shall see whether your hero will come to rescue you — and what will happen to him if he does!" He blew on a small instrument that gave forth a wail.

"What are you doing, Father?" cried Lululu.

"That, my dear, is the mystic call used by the priests of Yak to summon Dingu, the spirit of the forest. Come, my excellent Bogar!"

Still laughing fiendishly, King Djurk swaggered down the temple steps. He and Bogar climbed back over the stepladder, which the floor-men then removed from Sasha's body. The cameras had not photographed the stepladder, or Sasha either, because Sasha was not yet supposed to have come onstage. A couple of action-shots of Sasha creeping would be spliced in after Djurk's departure. Neither Gelbman nor Harris was under consiline, as the former had reacted badly to the drug, and the latter's part was not important enough to justify the step.

Lululu uttered a piercing scream as (in theory) she perceived the snake slithering out of the jungle. Cornzan, aroused, rose from his cot, stretched his thews, and walked to the stage. Arriving within camera-range, he recoiled at the sight of Lululu and Sasha. He began stalking forward, slinking from bush to bush, sometimes shading his eyes with his hand.

Cornzan attracted Lululu's attention by whistling and throwing pebbles. Lululu gave a pretty squeak and raised her bound hands.

Cornzan scouted around and found a convenient vine. With his dagger he cut the lower attachment of the vine, took a good grip on the dangling upper section, and swung himself across Sasha's barrel and up again in an arc to the foot of the steps of the shrine. Pausing only to belay the loose end of the vine, he bounded up the steps and clasped Lululu in his brawny arms.

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HAVING cut her bonds, Cornzan made torrid love to her. When the dialogue became coherent again it ran:

Lululu: "But Cornzan, how did you find me?"

Cornzan: "Darling, such is my passion for you that instinct leads me to wherever you are." (Long kiss.) "Let me bear you off to be my mate in the clean free wilds."

Lululu: "But Father's spies and armies will follow us to the ends of Anthon!"

Cornzan: "Let the old *guntor* try! He shall learn what a chase a wilderness-bred barbarian can lead him!" (Cornzan jumped up and clapped a hand to the hilt of his sword.) "How now, you secret, black, and midnight hag! What is't you do?"

There was a general dropping of jaws. Knight turned fiercely to Hahn and whispered: "Hey, that ain't in the script, is it?"

"Hell, no!" said Hahn. "That's Shakespeare."

Knight made hair-tearing motions. "But what — why —"

Sorokin beckoned. When Knight and Hahn had followed him back from the stage far enough so that their voices would not affect the sound-track, Sorokin said: "I told you your talking would affect the indoctrination! It is that poem. I am not Shakespearean scholar, but was that interpolated line not from 'Macbeth?'"

"Yeah," said Knight, peering back towards the stage. "Let's hope it's the only one. Remington seems to have gotten back in the groove; we can cut out that one fluff."

The three men trailed back towards the stage, on which Cornzan was again explaining his plans between kisses to Lululu, who did not seem to have noticed the unflattering description that he had just applied to her.

Cornzan: "If we can but win south through the jungle to the plains of Syrp, the Green Men will befriend us. I learned the arts of war among them in my youth. What man dare, I dare: approach thou like the rugged Russian bear, the arm'd rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger; take any shape but that, and my firm nerves shall never tremble: or be alive again, and dare me to the desert with thy sword; if trembling I inhabit then, protest me the baby of a girl. Hence, horrible shadow! Unreal mockery, hence!"

Lynd came back from the stage with dismay on his face. Sorokin said: "He is getting worse."

"What'll we *do?*" said Lynd.

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"We had better stop the shooting and give them the antidote before Mr. Dallas mistakes somebody for a Shakespearean character and tries to kill him."

Knight's face became apoplectic. His fists clenched, his eyes rolled wildly, and his face turned red and pale by turns. He shook with the effort of repressing his urge to scream and shout. "You — you mean we gotta cut the scene in the middle and give 'em the antidote? And ruin the day's shooting?"

"You have what you have shot already," said Sorokin. "Now that Dallas is off his indoctrination, is no telling what he will do."

Knight ground his teeth. "Then what?"

"You cannot simply go up to them and say, 'No more acting, please.' They are in a trance, and if you interrupt them, or force a violent incongruity upon their consciousness, you will send them into convulsions. That is how Cary Chambers died."

"Not to mention what Remington'll do if he mistakes you for Macduff," added Hahn.

"Oh, Lord!" Knight raised fists to a heedless heaven. "What'll we do, then?"

"Have you anesthol charges for that squirt-pistol in your dispensary?" asked Sorokin.

"How should I know? C'mon, let's find out." Knight seized the little scientist's wrist and dragged him off.

Hahn turned his attention back to the stage, on which Cornzan was now striding back and forth with his chin in his hand, booming:

"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, creeps in this petty pace from day to day, to the last syllable of recorded time; and all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more; it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

How apt, thought Hahn, when the pat-pat of men running on tiptoe made him turn to see Knight and Sorokin coming back. Knight held the squirt-pistol and Sorokin a hypodermic needle.

Knight panted: "Hey, Eisenhower, where the hell did Bob Gelbman get to?"

Lynd answered: "He just went; he was through for the day."

"Oh, no!" Knight glared wildly. "Look. This is how we're gonna do it. Doc Sorokin's the only one knows how to use the gun and the

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needle. If he walks up to Remington in his regular clothes, Remington will cut his head off, thinking he's one of Djurk's gang, or will fall down foaming in a fit and prob'ly die on account of having his illusion busted. If Doc dresses up like an Anthonian character, Remington will just cut his head off, period."

"What then?" said Hahn.

Knight stared at Franklin Hahn with a fixity that made Hahn sorry that he had spoken. "I was gonna ask Gelbman to go onstage and engage Remington in swordplay while Doc sneaked up behind him and shot him with this. But since Bob's gone, you're the one who comes closest to his size and looks. So duck into the dressing-room and climb into the King Djurk costume, quick!"

"But, Ego!" said Hahn. "I'm no swashbuckler; I just *write* the drool. You don't want your best scripter's head cut off, either."

"No time to argue. Do like I say, or out you go. And don't be scared of Remington; the fencing he learned was designed to put on a good show — not to kill anybody."

"But —"

Knight seized Hahn by the wrist and dragged him, protesting, towards the dressing-rooms. Sorokin followed.

WHEN Hahn and Sorokin reached the stage again, the show still had nine minutes to run. They were clad as Djurk and Bogar respectively, though without makeup, and Sorokin's spectacles impaired the effectiveness of his disguise.

Knight whispered instructions to his improvised actors and shoved them towards the stage. The word had spread among the floor-men that something was wrong, and people crowded up to the clearance-lines to see.

Cornzan was ranting: "Arm, arm, and out! If this which he avouches does appear, there is no flying hence, nor tarrying here. I 'gin to be aweary of the sun, and wish the estate o' the world were now undone. Ring the alarm-bell! Blow, wind! come, wrack! At least we'll die with harness on our back!" He whirled to face Lululu. "But come, sweetheart. Any minute your villainous father will return. While for myself I'm too proud to run from his whole army, I fear lest you take harm from him."

Lululu: "But Cornzan, how shall we get over that horrible snake?"

Cornzan: "Just as I did: by this vine. They have tied me to a

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stake; I cannot fly, but bear-like I must fight the course. What's he that was not born of woman? Such a one am I to fear, or none."

Franklin Hahn, conscious of the long sword banging his knees, and the projections of his costume jabbing him in unexpected places, mounted the stepladder, which had been re-erected over Sasha's body. He heard Sorokin behind him as he climbed down on the other side, his scabbard bumping the steps. Then he started up the slope towards the Temple of Yak.

Cornzan: "One good swing and over we go — but hold, what's this? By the gods of Anthon, King Djurk himself! Enter first murderer!"

Lululu: "That's odd; he looks somehow different from how he did a few minutes ago."

Cornzan: "He's shaved off his beard, but I'd know that sneering face anywhere. But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn, brandish'd by man that's of a woman born. And Bogar too! Ahhhh!"

Cornzan leaped lightly from the top step of the shrine to the ground in front, whipping out his sword. He bared his incisors, and gave forth a sound like tearing a piece of sheet-iron. This was the feral snarl of the untamed barbarian, at the sound of which the beasts of Anthon slunk into their lairs.

Lululu called: "Oh, Cornzan, try not to kill him! After all he is my father!"

The script had called for Lululu, during the love-making, to hook to Cornzan's harness the end of a piano-wire. Cornzan was to have picked her up with one arm while he tried to swing back across the snake by means of the vine held in the other, but the vine would break under their combined weight. Then Cornzan would pick himself up, gather Lululu into his arms, and leap over the snake's body. As this feat was beyond the real thews even of Remington Dallas, he would be hoisted over by the piano-wire. But the Shakespearean interpolations had so upset the performance that the wire had never been attached.

IGNORING Lululu's last request, Cornzan stalked forward, teeth bared, head sunk forward between his shoulders in a Neanderthaloid posture. He said: "I will not yield to kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet, and to be baited with the rabble's curse. Though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane, and thou oppos'd,

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being of no woman born, yet I will try the last: before my body I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff, and damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!' "

"Get around!" said Hahn to Sorokin, and then the whirlwind struck.

Clang! Zing! Clang! went the swords. Hahn parried desperately. He knew that property swords were dull, so that even if Cornzan got home he would not really cut Hahn's head off — only half off.

Hahn, backing as he parried, was vaguely aware of Ilya Sorokin hovering in Cornzan's rear, trying to get a shot with his squirt-pistol. Then Franklin Hahn turned an ankle over a property jungle root, made an awkward parry as he recovered, and felt the sword knocked out of his hand. It spun through the conditioned air to fall with a clang on the concrete outside the stage.

BEFORE Cornzan could make a tigerish leap to finish his victim, Sorokin hurled the squirt-pistol. The missile struck the back of Cornzan's head, but being a light structure of plastic and aluminum it bounced off, providing merely enough of a blow to distract.

Cornzan whirled, whooped, and started for Ilya Sorokin, shouting: "The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon! Where gott'st thou that goose look?"

Sorokin ran straight away from his pursuer, and Franklin Hahn, after a half-second's delay, ran after Cornzan. As a straight line starting within a circle is bound to intersect the circle, Sorokin's course brought him to the body of Sasha, twenty feet from the serpent's head. The stepladder lay in the other direction, so that to reach it Sorokin would have had to run two-thirds of the way around Sasha's circumference.

The little scientist therefore placed his hands on the scaly back and half vaulted, half scrambled over. He recovered on the other side and started off again. The touch aroused Sasha, whose head, for the first time since the shooting had started, began to rise from the ground.

Cornzan, pounding after Sorokin, took off in a soaring leap over the reptile's body. Either he miscalculated or he, too, had trouble with the unevenness of the ground, for he failed to clear Sasha. Instead he came down on the snake. His leading foot slipped off the scales, and Cornzan landed outside the circle with a whirl of arms and legs and a grand slam. In striking the snake he had acci-

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dentally driven the point of his sword into Sasha to a depth of several inches. The weapon stuck upright in the snake's back.

Franklin Hahn took off right behind Cornzan but, with more skill or better luck, cleared the snake, missed the sword, and came down on top of Cornzan. When Hahn collected himself he found himself straddling the prone if noble savage.

Feeling the warrior's thews gathering under him to throw him off, and then presumably to tear him limb from limb, Hahn planted a roundhouse swing on the side of Cornzan's jaw. The blow hurt Hahn's knuckles but dazed Cornzan. Hahn then pulled out the dagger he wore in his sash, gripped it by its dull blade, and whacked Cornzan over the head with the massive jeweled hilt.

Hahn's attention was drawn by a sound like a jet of steam under high pressure. He looked up to see Sasha's head, poised on ten feet of neck, swaying towards him. The anaconda was usually harmless — not from conscious docility, but from sheer stupid inertia; besides he had been drugged. However, to be scrambled and fallen over by two men had roused him from his torpor, and to have his hide pierced by a property sword was too much. Sasha was angry.

A yard of greeny-yellow forked tongue issued from his mouth-groove, wavered about, and slid back, drawing the ambient air past the olifactory nerve-endings on his palate. His four-foot jaws opened to emit another Mesozoic hiss.

Hahn threw himself back from the recumbent Cornzan and half rose.

Mortimer Knight shouted: "If he eats our star it'll ruin the show!"

THE PROGRAM manager bounded forward, hands clutching, just as Hahn made up his mind to save Dallas too: a creditable action, since Dallas was his rival for the love of Cassia MacDermott. Knight got a wrist and Hahn an ankle. Each started to pull, but in opposite directions. Even under favorable conditions Remington Dallas' 228 pounds would have made their endeavor precarious, and as it was they got nowhere.

For two seconds they heaved at the actor, grunting. Then Sasha struck. As Knight was the nearest and noisiest, the snake snapped at him, turning his head sidewise, and caught the executive from behind around the hips — one jaw on each hip.

Knight let go of Dallas and was dragged backwards, screaming

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and thrashing. Sasha made a gulping motion, gaining a tooth or two in the process of swallowing Knight rear-first. If the snake had thrown a coil around Knight, the Ego would have been snuffed out instantly. But either Sasha deemed this prey too small to be worth crushing, or was too lazy to heave his monstrous barrel into the necessary loops. At eleven tons he was, as Sorokin had said, too heavy to be very active.

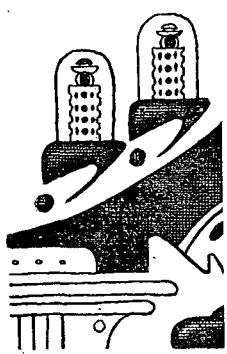
Sasha began working his loosely-hinged lower jaw forward, first one side and then the other. As the teeth of a non-venomous snake are slender pegs pointing back towards the throat, Knight's struggles only drove the teeth more deeply into his tissues.

When Knight released his hold on Dallas, Hahn dragged the actor back a couple of steps before realizing that Knight was in more imminent danger. A din of shouts and cries arose from those witnessing the action. Jaffe shouted orders at Lynd, who shouted orders at his two assistant directors, who shouted at each other to rush in and do something.

Hahn saw Cornzan's sword still sticking up from Sasha's back. He

Adventures in Space and Time

The Shape of Worlds to Come



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stepped forward, wrenched the sword out, moved to where Knight writhed in Sasha's jaws, and took a wild two-handed swipe.

His target was in an awkward position, as the weight of Knight's body was too great for the snake to raise from the floor. The blow missed Sasha's head and grazed Knight's, half severing his right ear. Knight shrieked more loudly than ever.

Franklin Hahn struck again, more carefully. The blow landed on the top of Sasha's head between the eyes. The dull blade crunched through scales and bone. Sasha hissed through his full jaws and started to back up, bending his neck into a zigzag and dragging Knight along the ground.

Hahn followed, striking. The snake's bone-structure was not very resistant; the trouble was to find, in that monstrous head, the little ganglion that served Sasha for a brain. Crunch! Crunch! Sasha's body writhed and bumped. A lash of his tail knocked over seven lights and two cameras, and broke a cameraman's leg; a flip in the other direction sent the Temple of Yak flying. The audience scattered like a flock of sparrows.

Hahn hewed at the scaly head until the writhing subsided and the great jaws went slack. The snake lay still save for an occasional reflex-jerk. Sasha was dead.

The bell announcing the end of the shooting clanged. Franklin Hahn looked up to see Cassia MacDermott, whose manner showed that she had, as told to in the indoctrination, come out of her consiline-trance when she heard the bell.

She said: "My goodness, Frank, what *have* you been doing? And what's the matter with Mr. Knight? And — oh, *poor* Remington!"

MORTIMER KNIGHT and the injured cameraman lay in the dispensary. When the physicians had completed their task, Knight's harsh yell arose: "I wanna see that guy Hahn!"

"Here I am, Ego," said Hahn. "When do they say you'll be up and around?"

"Couple weeks. Nothing but a few punctures; no poison." Knight glared up from his pillow, his right ear hidden by a mass of bandage. "And by God, by that time you'll be out of here! You're fired!"

"Me? But I thought I just saved your life!"

"Hell, you bungled everything! You've ruined the Cornzan series! You didn't hold Dallas in play until Sorokin could shoot him; you

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damn near cut my ear off. You killed Sasha, and we'll have to pay the Sorokin Laboratories for the snake."

"Good Lord, Ego, you're raving! If I hadn't killed the snake you'd be playing a rubber of bridge with those three sheep by now —"

"And anyway you're too goddam fresh and insubordinate! Get out! Off the lot! Draw your pay and go!" screamed Knight.

"Here," said a physician to Hahn. "I don't know who you are, but I can't have you exciting my patient that way."

"Me?" said Hahn with bitter irony. But he went.

Reflecting that if his job were in danger he had better not be seen loafing, Hahn returned to his office and worked on scripts. He had Cornzan and Lululu trapped in the lost city of Gwor by the Mukluks (a race of Anthonian ghouls whose heads stayed home and sent their bodies forth to seek prey by remote telepathic control) when Mrs. Mazzatenta, Lynd's secretary, came in with some pieces of paper. Hahn found a check for his next month's pay and a dismissal notice.

Franklin Hahn stared at the notice until belief soaked into his consciousness. Then he went to protest to Jaffe, who smiled sadly and

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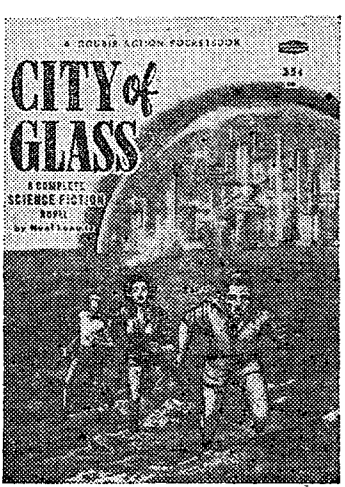

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said: "I wish I could help, Franklin my boy. Your work is okay, but I can't overrule the Ego unless I'm ready to fire him. And you know what would happen if I told him to keep somebody in his department he didn't like."

"Are you his boss or aren't you?" said Hahn with heat.

"Sometimes I wonder. I know the Ego is a heel of the first water, but he is a genius and he does bring in the money." Ben Jaffe heaved himself out of his chair and came around his desk to pat Hahn's shoulder. "Don't take it too hard, Frank; you'll always have a good job somewhere."

FRANKLIN HAHN was cleaning out his desk just before five when Cassia MacDermott and Remington Dallas came in.

Cassia said: "Oh, Frank, we wanted to say how sorry we are to hear you've been fired and to thank you for what you did this afternoon."

Hahn shrugged. "That was nothing."

"We also wanted to ask if you wouldn't congratulate us on our engagement."

"What?"

"Yes. I guess we really are Cornzan and Lululu spiritually."

"Uh-huh," said Hahn as Dallas stood beaming silently. "Have a good time, kids."

In leaving, they passed Sorokin coming in. Cassia said: "I'm sorry about your snake, Ilya; were you devoted to him?"

Sorokin shrugged. "Is nothing. Snakes not responsive pets, and Sasha cost too much to feed."

"I always wanted to appear with him in a snake-charming act — 'Cassia and Sasha.' Goodnight."

Sorokin said: "I, too, have heard, my dear Hahn. Perhaps you can explain this?"

"What's that?"

"Is the missing capsule of anesthol. When I tried to shoot Dallas, the gun would not discharge, so I threw it. Afterwards, while supervising removal of Sasha's remains, I picked this up from the floor where Knight had stood."

"You think he slipped you the gun empty on purpose, so we'd get our heads cut off by Remington?"

"That is what I think."

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"But why? I know the Ego's an egregious kind of character . . ."

"Because I, in a moment of foolish rage, told him about my new somnone-beta. His quick mind seized the implications of my stupid boast. Perhaps, he thought, my process is not yet perfected or recorded; so if he can arrange my death, it will go to the grave with me. Thus the ruin of the radio-television business will be averted."

"What are you going to do? Call the gendarmes?"

"We have nothing like proof. Better leave it alone and content ourselves with milking a few million from WCNQ."

"You mean that 'we' editorially, don't you?"

"No, I mean you and me; would you not like a million dollars?"

"Sure, but why me?" said Hahn.

"You saved my life this afternoon."

"No-o, I can't say I did. I chased Remington, but you were getting away from him when I caught him."

"The will was there. Besides, you have now been fired on partly my account. You have talked as if you had good business sense, so you are my partner. I need someone to handle business details, and my last partner I had to put in jail. Gather your stuff, please."

A MONTH later, on a Saturday morning, Franklin Hahn sat at his desk at the Sorokin Laboratories looking at a big beautiful check representing his cut of the first installment paid by WCNQ to suppress Sorokin's patent on the somnone-beta process. Hahn telephoned Cassia to tell her of his luck.

"That's wonderful!" she said. "I wish I could have seen the Ego's face. How much money did you say? . . . Can I call you back in a few minutes? . . . G'bye."

Ten minutes later Cassia called Hahn back. "I just wanted to call up Remington to break our engagement."

"Huh?"

"Yes. He's a beautiful hunk of man, but as you said he has no more brains than Sasha had. Now I wondered if you'd like to take me out tonight?"

"Would I!" howled Hahn. "And I don't even have to buy a toupée?"

Five minutes later Franklin Hahn hung up with an expression of imbecilic bliss.

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(Continued from second cover)

ing in science fiction and fantasy magazines since 1937, and is most widely known to science-fictionists for his collaborations with Fletcher Pratt. The fact that most of these have been fantasy, rather than science fiction, is just one of the many things about de Camp that make editors tear their hair and pray for another story from him soon.

CAROL EMSHWILLER No doubt, many people have wondered what the wife of a science-fiction cover artist and interior illustrator thinks of science fiction. Well, in this case, the answer would be, "She thinks quite a bit of it," and we present evidence herein that Carol has grown tired of basking in Ed's glory, and has decided to make contributions of her own to the field. We're happy to be the sponsors of her first story in this medium.

DAMON KNIGHT Back in the early Forties, that section of the science-fiction following which was publishing their own amateur magazines for mutual enjoyment began to receive copies of a publication entitled *Snide*, published, mostly written, and entirely illustrated by one Damon Knight. Since then, Knight has appeared in newsstand science fiction and fantasy publications as interior artist, author, editor, and critic. His present reputation as one of the most perceptive and reliable (and many would strike out "one of") critics dealing with the fantasy and science fiction is based on thorough knowledge of the field, both as consumer and producer.

THEODORE L. THOMAS Mr. Thomas is a patent lawyer, in his mid-thirties, presently residing in Pennsylvania. He has written popular articles on science for a number of years, for a syndicated column entitled, "Science for Everybody." While his output is not large, as with Mr. Bade, he writes a memorable story when the inspiration strikes him—the result showing that he has followed the traditional one-tenth inspiration with nine-tenths hard thinking and hard work. He has collaborated with another occasional science-fiction author, who is also a patent lawyer, Charles L. Harness.

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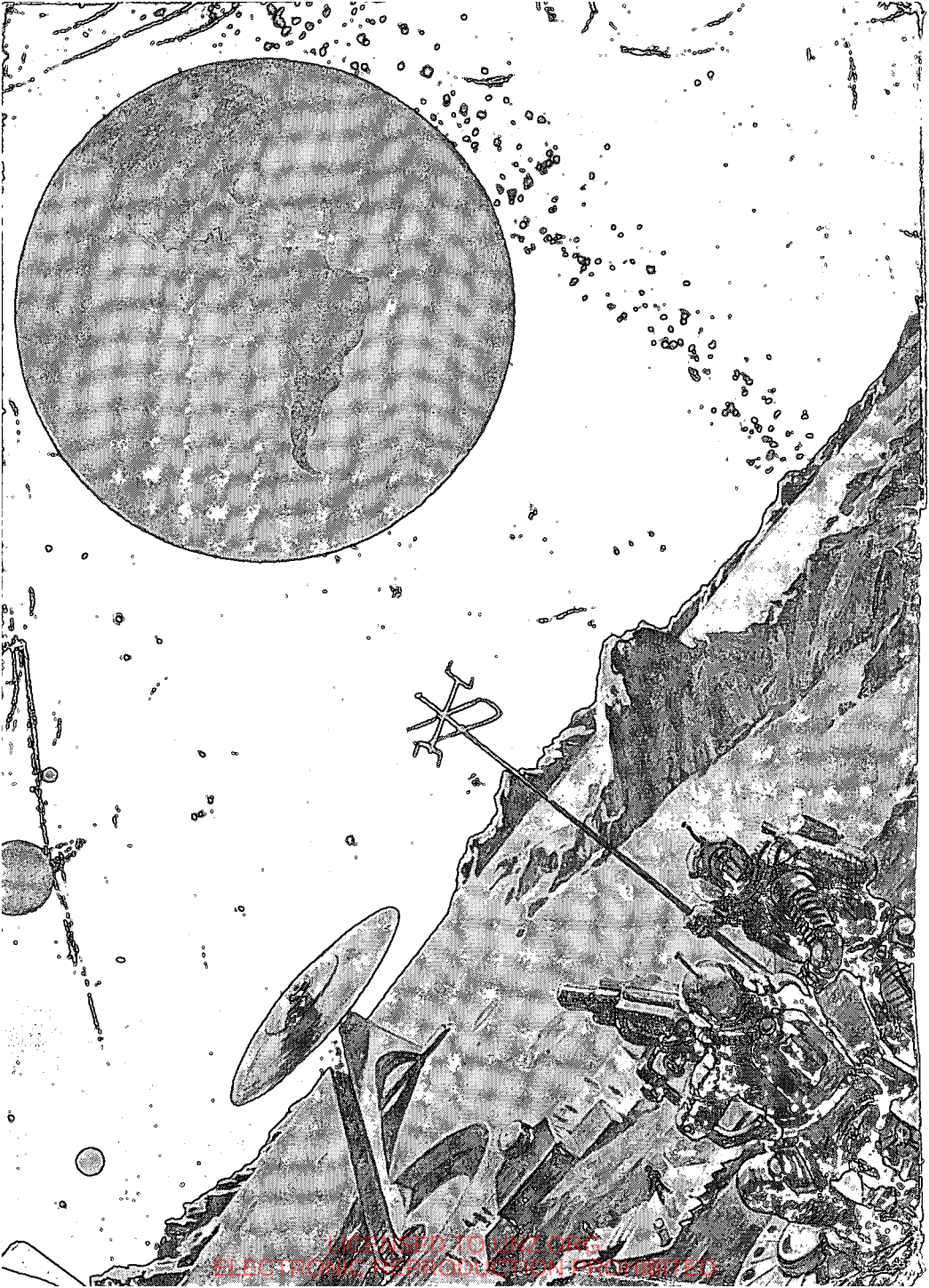
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